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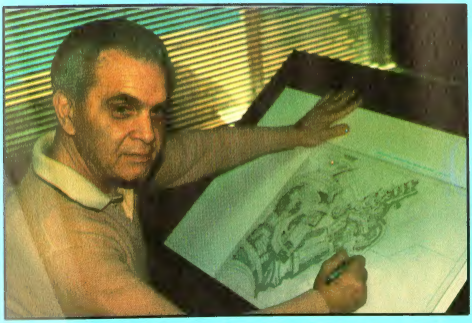
HAPPY HAL'S HOWLINGS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MARVEL!!

See you next issue guys—
I'm off to the celebration...
—Happy Hal



STAN LEE
AND
JACK KIRBY

They started it all!

COMICS FEATURE

COLUMNS

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FEATURES

SPECIAL CELEBRATION MARVEL'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

25 years ago a small, struggling company, Atlas Comics, took a daring chance. And Marvel Comics was born. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created dozens of revolutionary new characters and the company became the largest publisher of comic books in the United States. And a major force in animation. Jim Shooter carries on the tradition as current editor-in-chief. In an exclusive anniversary tribute, **COMICS FEATURE** talked to Lee, Kirby and Shooter as well as loads of other people to learn what lies ahead in comic books, animation and movies. What special projects did we learn of? How do Lee and Kirby feel about the contributions they have made and about the company today? All of this and more lies ahead on page...

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STAFF

Hal Schuster
Editor/Publisher

Robert Lewis
Prod. Mgr./Art Director

James Van Hise
John Peel
Ron Goulart
Contributing Editors

Michael Mayo
Jim Keegan
Ruth Kennedy
Alice Matevosian
Production Assistants

Jack Schuster
Resident Superhero

Cliff Cairns
Circulation Director

For Advertising Information Contact:

Jay Eisenberg
JE PUBLISHERS REPRESENTATIVE CO.
6855 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 200
Los Angeles, CA 90038
(213) 467-2266

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FEATURE NEWS

THE 'NAM

MARVEL LAUNCHES NEW WAR COMIC!

A soldier, fresh out of training, leaves for Washington as he ships out for combat duty in Vietnam. The year is 1966.

This is the beginning of **The 'Nam**, a new monthly series written by veteran Doug Murray, penciled by Michael Golden and inked by Armando Gil. By the time it is complete, it will be an 8-year chronicle of American combat action in that war.

The 'Nam will follow the action seen by members of the Army 25th Mechanized Infantry Division, beginning early in 1966 and continuing through the entire war.

"If someone has every issue, they will have a month-by-month dramatized history of the Vietnam War," explains editor Larry Hama. "This is an 8-year long limited series. It will carry on chronologically right up to the last helicopter that left the embassy roof in Saigon."

The series will involve an ever-changing cast of characters in the myriad combat situations that arose in the jungles of Southeast Asia. New players will enter the scene as others are sent home or die in action.

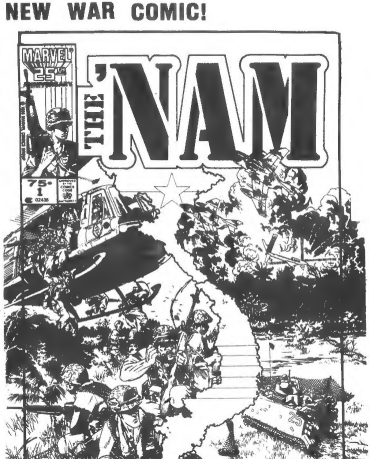
A division such as the 25th Infantry can contain more than 10,000 persons including artillery, aircraft, tank and HQ personnel, engineers and MPs. "We'll cover it all," Hama says. "A division is the largest unit that moves as a single force—the next step down from an army group itself."

The 1966-74 time period was chosen to coincide with active U.S. military involvement in combat situations. To accurately produce a project of this magnitude Doug Murray, a Vietnam veteran himself, had to gather a tremendous amount of research material, including microfilm of the New York Times for the years covered.

Michael Golden's intricate, detailed artwork lends itself perfectly to the mood, settings and action depicted in the series. "It will be done in Michael's unique half-realistic, half-caricature style," Hama continues. "He's come up with a very different look for the book."

Golden has collaborated with Doug Murray on the "5th to the 1st" series appearing in **Savage Tales**. Formerly the regular artist for **Micronauts**, he has also lent his talents to **The Avengers**, **X-Men** and **G.I. Joe**. He is considered to be one of the most popular artists with fans.

This comic book marks an important change in America. Fifteen years ago the country was seriously divided over our role in the Vietnam conflict. Some felt that we did not belong and should pull out immediately, while others felt that since we had become committed to the conflict we must bring hostilities to a satisfactory solution. A few still believed that we were correct in entering the conflict and should remain since we served a proper role. Within the heat of the discussion there seemed little room for a realistic perception of the American fighting man. Many refused to honor his heroic role because they



disagreed with the reason he was sent. In fact, when Captain America entered the battle zone, the symbol of America itself remained uncommitted, a neutral. Obviously the nation was going through a trauma.

A few years ago the catharsis began. We reevaluated our role as a people and found that what had been done may not have been without reason and honor. Such a fundamental change in the belief of a society is always reflected in its popular culture. First such action stars as Chuck Norris and Sylvester Stallone dramatized our new feelings on the screen. Now Marvel Comics is launching the first comic book series devoted to the conflict to be issued since the end of the war. (Next issue **COMICS FEATURE** will present an interview with writer Doug Murray.)

continued on page 14

Animated Antics

BY JAMES VAN HISE

Once upon a time, when Marvel Comics was young, there was a tv show spun around the Merry Marvel Marching Society, the official Marvel Comics fan club of that day. Produced by Grantrey/Lawrence, the syndicated show featured such stalwarts as Thor, Iron Man, Captain America, the Incredible Hulk and the Sub-Mariner. The five-minute cartoons serialized adventures directly from the comic books. These cartoons not only adapted stories ver batim from the magazines, but they used the actual comic art as the basis for their animation. Although calling the work limited animation would be an encomium, they were nonetheless effective because they did employ the original art as a springboard. They retained all the dramatic impact of the original Stan Lee and Jack Kirby stories.

What real animation did appear in the cartoons was limited to moving lips for dialogue and throwing punches in fight scenes. Much on-screen movement was accomplished via fast camera moves, closeups and editing. But for all the crudeness in the approach, they worked! Why? Because they were faithful to the material. The cartoons captured the characters. They didn't present their versions of the stories but the comic book tales themselves, exactly, without watering them down or missing the point. The character voices sounded just as we imagined these powerful souls must sound and dialogue was delivered in the same straightforward manner. Then they disappeared for many years.

Now they are back, available on prerecorded tape from the Prism Entertainment Corporation. Initial plans were for 18 releases to hit the market with 12 to follow each quarter. This schedule has been scaled down somewhat.

Because Prism is not one of the larger video distributors, it hasn't placed the tapes in as many outlets as you can find old movies from, say, Columbia or Universal.

During a recent visit to Stan Lee's office at Marvel Productions in L.A., I saw a number of the titles. All of them sport eye-catching scenes of Marvel superheroes and villains.

Prism has acquired the rights to release more than 100 hours of Marvel animation on tape. Each tape retails for $19.95, making it very attractive for buyers.

Besides the characters already mentioned, releases will also include the Sixties animated version of the Fantastic Four by Hanna-Barbera, the one which did include The Human Torch. The voices on that version of the F.F. included Gerald Mohr as Reed Richards, Jo Ann Pflug as Sue Richards, Jack Flounders as Johnny Storm and Paul Frees as Ben Grimm. Some of the stories on this show were also adapted from comics, including "The Micro-World of Dr. Doom" (FF 16) and "Kurrgo, Master of Planet X" (FF 7). These adaptations are not as true to the originals and are seemingly padded to fill time. Characterizations are basic and yet are more interesting than most of what followed in the Seventies and beyond.

In this, the twenty-fifth anniversary year of Marvel, it's hard to remember when there were only a dozen titles and each contained something new and exciting every month. Seeing them adapted into cartoon form for the first time helped vindicate our belief in this small company which was rewriting the rules on how to do superheroes. Those who weren't around in the mid-Sixties to see the first Marvel cartoon shows will discover something unique and unusual.

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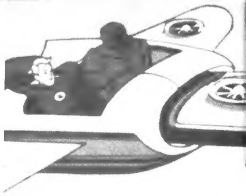
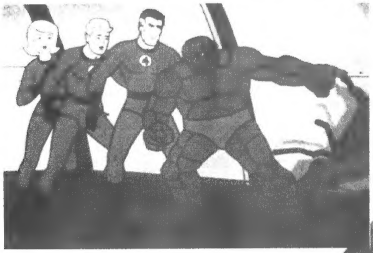


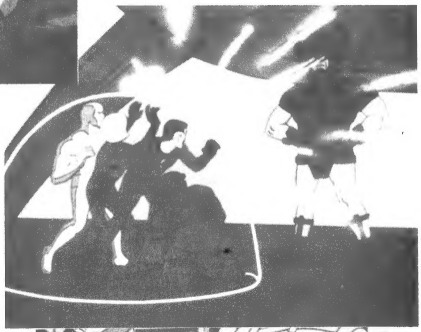
These cartoons capture the feel of reading a comic book and demonstrate how drawings and word balloons are actually closer to cinema than they are to novels. Expect something different, and something surprising.

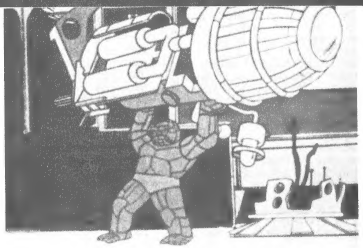
CF

JAMES VAN HISE IS THE EDITOR OF MOVIELAND *AND A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF* COMICS FEATURE.

Marvel Super Heroes On Video







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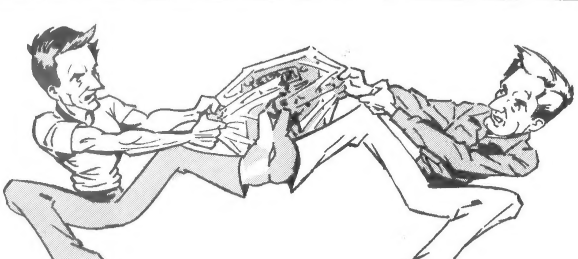
FUN & PROFIT

BY MIKE BENTON



TRADING COMICS

Have you *traded* comics lately?

Probably not. Collectors today spend most of their time (and money!) buying new comics and back issues.

Yet in our hobby's not-too-distant past, trading comics was the same thing as collecting comics.

All through the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, everybody who read comics also traded them. Little brothers, older sisters, even mothers and fathers swapped accumulations and collections of comics back and forth.

In the early 1950s, when comic book reading was at its peak (the *average* boy and girl of that time read 20 comic books a week!), there were even huge comic book swap shops.

I've spoken with older collectors who remember these giant used comic shops of thirty and forty years ago. (Happy Hal here: I was still going to these in the late '60s!)

"It was a comic book reader's paradise," a woman about fifty told me. "I remember seeing tens of thousands of comic books packed into wall bins and stacked on tables about three feet deep. They usually sold two comics for a nickle, but they also traded two-for-one.

"Every Saturday, all the kids would come in with their boxes of comics and trade them for new ones to read. It was like a giant comic lending library. And then later in the week, the neighborhood girls and boys would trade the comics again with each other—usually one for one, although even then a good Batman was worth about four Archie comics!"

Trading comics was so popular thirty years ago because it was the only way a kid could read the hundreds of comics that appeared on the newsstands each month. Back in the early 1950s, you might find three hundred different titles on the racks. You bought a few, your friends bought some different ones, and you traded back and forth the rest of the month.

Gradually as comic books became more "valuable," trading became less common.

Collectors didn't want to trade comics back and forth because the constant reading and re-reading damaged the books. Then, too, collectors became very money conscious.

Trading was no longer "my comic book for your comic book." Now each book had its own dollar value, and we began trading "Guide Value" for "Guide Value."

Today trading has almost disappeared from comic collecting circles. Most of the trading still done occurs at conventions where dealers swap high-dollar books back and forth among themselves. Collectors have largely turned their backs on trading, and maybe it's time we re-think our position.

One reason that today's collectors have become disillusioned with trading is that they usually exchange with dealers only. Dealers want money, not more comics. Consequently, you'll usually do worse trading comics than if you actually bought them outright from a dealer.

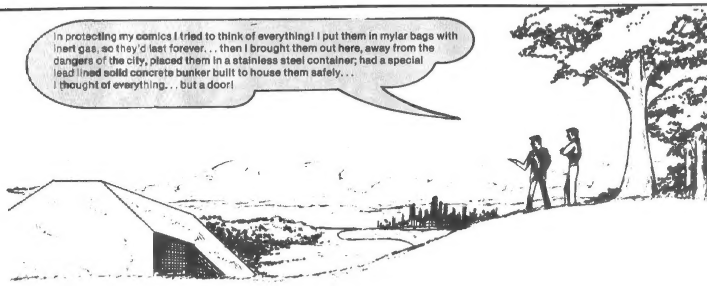
Trading is more properly a "collector to collector" activity. For good swaps to happen, you have to get collectors together in a non-commercial environment.

Local collectors often get together for a party and trading session. People bring all the comics they no longer want in their collections, and the swapping starts.

It's a good idea to prohibit any exchange of money at trading sessions. Some collectors even like to outlaw the Price Guide at such parties—and *that's* where the fun can really start as you match wits with each other for the best deals.

You might also want to think about starting a small private "comic exchange" service among several of your friends. Each person buys three or four new comics each month, and circulates them to all the collectors in your circle. This way, everybody gets a chance to read most of the new titles without going broke.

The best thing about trading is that it's free, fun and everybody gets new comics for their collections. Tell me something better.


In protecting my comics I tried to think of everything! I put them in mylar bags with inert gas, so they'd last forever... then I brought them out here, away from the dangers of the city, placed them in a stainless steel container, had a special lead lined solid concrete bunker built to house them safely...
I thought of everything... but a door!

STORING YOUR COMICS

I untaped *two* plastic bags and pulled out the comic book that a collector had so carefully packed away.

There was a blob of red paint on the back cover and old corn flakes smashed inside the book. It had been bent, folded, stapled and mutilated.

Besides that, the comic book was **Defenders 135**—worth about two-bits (*without* the corn flakes and red splotches).

Two thoughts popped into my brain:

First, how in the name of Odin can a comic book only two years old suffer that kind of abuse? A group of little brothers must have been working overtime to inflict both paint and cereal damage so quickly.

Second, why was this absolutely worthless comic packaged tightly in two plastic bags for protection and preservation?

The next night I was over at another collector's home to view his legendary E.C. collection. He had bought these great comics back in the early 1950s off the newsstands for cover price. Today, his collection is worth five thousand dollars—but probably not for long.

You see, he has all these comics stuck in cardboard boxes that are as old as the comics themselves. They're not in any protective bags, and I saw pieces of the covers falling off into the box as he lifted them out.

"Why don't you put some of those comics in Mylar bags, Jim?" I asked him.

"Nah. I figured it would cost me about $280 dollars to buy enough of them for my books. That's more than I paid for all these comics originally."

I shook my head and prayed to the gods of comic collecting to protect Jim's comics from himself.

These two stories point out one fact:

Collectors make more mistakes about storing their comics than anything else. And it's no wonder.

Today there are hundreds of ways to protect your comics. You got your standard plastic bags (in one, two and three millimeter thickness), Mylar bags (with and without flaps), Myilte bags, cardboard backing (thick and thin), deacidification, encapsulation (with or without inert gases) and even underground storage vaults in the mountains of Nevada.

With so many choices, collectors still either spend far too little money to preserve their valuable comics, or they spend far too much money to protect comics not worth protecting.

What we need is a set of guidelines so we can determine such things as:

What is the *best* way to store a supervaluable comic? How do you store a brand-new comic that might be worth some money some day? Do you need to store new comics and old comics differently? And finally, how much money should you spend to protect your comics?

First, there are only two reasons to protect a comic book: (1) For the monetary value it represents, and (2) For the personal pleasure that you derive from its existence.

For example, you would certainly want to spend a dollar to protect a comic that's worth a hundred dollars. On the other hand, I've also spent a dollar to protect a comic only worth a dollar. In this case, it is an old comic from my childhood, one of the first books I ever bought.

Obviously, the value of a comic book alone cannot determine how much money we should spend to protect it.

What follows is a guided tour (with suggestions) of the various ways to store and protect your collection. The methods are arranged from the cheapest to most expensive:

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58

STRIP SEARCH

R.C. HARVEY

Mary Gold died on April 30, 1929. The public outcry when her death became known was gratifying in both its precipitousness and its volume. Switchboards at major metropolitan newspapers were clogged for hours. Mail rooms quickly overflowed with letters expressing sympathy and outrage. Her doctors could offer no medical explanation for her death. They merely muttered shame-faced speculations about the vagaries of the human mechanism, and many of her friends consequently concluded that the cause of death was a broken heart—the tragic and tattered end of a labyrinthian love story that should have ended happily.

The body politic had been following the ups and downs of Mary Gold's love life for months. She'd been courted by a young inventor, Tom Carr, but on the eve of their wedding, he'd been arrested for absconding with his backers' money. After a long trial, he was found guilty and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Mary Gold came to public attention in the sensational aftermath of the trial.

Grief stricken, she nonetheless consented to marry a friend of her family's, a wealthy banker named Henry J. Ausstinn. On the day of the lavish wedding, the ceremony was spectacularly interrupted by Tom Carr's brother, who produced evidence that not only established his brother's innocence but fingered Ausstinn as the man who'd stolen the money and framed Tom.

The strain of these events was too much for poor Mary. Her health broken, she took to bed with a high fever, and in a week or so, she was dead. The outburst of public sentiment promptly exploded all across the country.

Public preoccupation with the affairs of private citizens was scarcely novel in the Twenties (or in any other period, for that matter). During that decade, the mass media were coming of age, and newspapers learned to play upon the nation's curiousity with all the skill of a pied piper fingering his flute. Newspapers seized upon every scandal or sensation that seemed to capture the public fancy and kept it on the front pages for weeks.

Of course, there were the daily doings of such luminaries as Waxey Gordon, Al Capone, Legs Diamond and Dutch Schultz. In addition, there was the Fifi Stillman divorce case (in which her husband maintained that their fifth child was illegitimate); the Fatty Arbuckle scandal (featuring the trial of the popular film comedian accused of murdering a movie extra girl); the Hall-Mills murder mystery (involving the unsolved killing of a pastor and a female member of his choir); and the Snyder-Gray sex-and-homicide epic (in which Ruth Snyder and her lover, a corset salesman, were brought to book for the murder of her husband).

Still, Mary Gold was different. The Mary Gold who died had never lived. She was only a paper doll. A character in a comic strip. Her sole distinction was in being the first major comic strip character to die. And the overwhelming public reaction to her death testified to the popularity of the comics with an authority difficult (if not impossible) to dispute.

AMERICA'S FAVORITE PAPER

Not that there was any dispute. The comic strip in which Mary Gold lived and died was **The Gumps**, written and drawn for the Chicago **Tribune** by Sidney Smith. The strip dwelt with melodramatic excess on the opportunistic yearnings of Andy Gump, a creature whose bizarre, chinless physiognomy set him apart from every other comic strip character, man or beast, to appear before or since. But Andy's avaricious middle-class aspirations struck a chord—whether sympathetic or antithetic—among newspaper readers.

The Gumps began in the **Tribune** in 1917 and created such a stir that within a few years the strip was syndicated for distribution in every major city in which there was a newspaper with any pretentions to greatness. The combined circulation of the newspapers in which **The Gumps** appeared eventually reached twelve million. So valuable a property was the strip that the **Tribune** was moved to extraordinary financial largess when cartoonist Smith's contract came up for renewal in March, 1922. To retain his services, the **Tribune** made him a million dollar deal—$100,000 a year for the next ten years. At the time, President Harding earned but $75,000 annually; and Babe Ruth wouldn't sign his heralded $80,000 contract for eight more years.

Sidney Smith manipulated the daily doings of Andy, his wife Min, Uncle Bim and all the rest; but the strip was created, named and guided by Captain Joseph Medill Patterson, who had a genius for knowing what the public wanted.

At the time of Mary Gold's death, Captain Patterson was in command of the largest daily newspaper in America, the New York **Daily News**, which he and his cousin, Colonel Robert McCormick, had founded ten years earlier, using profits from their

A WILD SHRIEK — AND A FRAIL GIRL WHO AT THE LAST MOMENT HAS SLIPPED INTO THE COURT ROOM FALLS LIMPLY INTO HER FATHER'S ARMS — THE LONG STRAIN WITH IT'S TRAGIC CLIMAX HAVE PROVEN TOO MUCH FOR TENDER MAMY GOLD —
"THE GUMPS."
A leaky boat — FAR uncharted sea — and an incompetent pilot —
THE GOOD SHIP HOME COMFORTS
JUMP! MARRY — YOU'RE BAPE
MATRIMONY
SIDNEY SMITH
AS BE TROM A GAY A BON AND STYLE CRESTED IN EVERY WAY THAT A GENTLEMAN SHOULD WISH TO BE IN THE NEXT
M'KENNA GUMP WHO IS REALLY THE BONE OF THE FAMILY GENTLE, LOVING AND THOUGHTFUL WITH A STRONG SENSE OF HUMOR BUT A TERRIBLE WORK OF WORLD
SIDNEY SMITH
BUCK GUMP — THE BOULEVARD VAMPIRE —
WHOM'S NEVER BEEN ABLE TO GET SCARED AGAINST MANY HIS BIT TRAINING STUNT IS BEATING PLATES EVERY MORNING TO REST IN TRAIN
THE GUMPS NEW HOME — THERE ARE MANY STRANGE RUMORS ABOUT THIS HOUSE — SOME SAY THE PEACE IS HAUNTED — OTHERS FEEL IN THAT IT HAS BEEN BUILT BY A RUSSIAN SPY — A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS
Mary Gold's wardrobe will be most complete — She will have an outfit for each occasion — Her bold pocket-book is beginning to look as though it had been walked over by a troop of elephants —
SIDNEY SMITH

Chicago **Tribune** to invade the New York newspaper market.

The **News** began at the bottom of the heap with the lowest circulation of New York's 18 daily newspapers. In less than five years, it surpassed William Randolph Hearst's champion, the New York **Journal**. Patterson had beaten the king at his own game, and he had done it by giving the public what he knew it wanted—sex and scandal, games and contests.

Along the way, it is often said, Patterson also invented the continuity comic strip, the kind that tells a story from day to day instead of cranking a daily joke and leaving it at that. If he didn't invent the story strip, Patterson certainly midwifed at its birth and nursed it into healthy infancy.

Patterson's inspiration for a continuity strip may have arisen from his earlier experiences while in charge of the Sunday Chicago **Tribune**. He'd started running a directory of current attractions in Chicago's movie theatres, and, noting the favorable reader response, he soon hit upon another way to capitalize upon the popular fascination with the flickers.

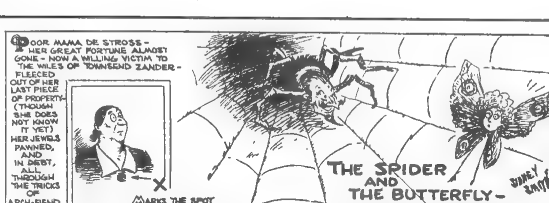
Making a deal with William Selig, the producer of one of the first movie serials, **The Adventures of Kathlyn**, Patterson began on January 4, 1914, to publish the written version of each week's installment the week before the film version appeared. Readers could win prizes by guessing the solutions to mysteries in each week's printed episode. **Kathlyn** ran for 26 weeks, and each week the **Tribune**'s circulation had to increase news agents' orders by hundreds of copies.

The lesson was not lost on Patterson. He continued to run written versions of serial thrillers, and the success of these features (together with that of serialized popular fiction), doubtless lodged in a corner of his brain an idea that he would later introduce into the medium of comic strips. A basic ingredient of the installment stories he was publishing was *continuation:* the reader, the newspaper buyer, had to buy next week's Sunday **Tribune** to see how the stories came out. And he had to go on buying the next week's edition as long as the story continued.

CONTINUITY STRIP REALITY

Comic strips that told continuing stories had been attempted before Captain Patterson took an interest in the idea. C.W. Kahles introduced **Hairbreadth Harry** in 1906, a Sunday strip that carried its story forward from week to week. And Harry Hershfield used daily continuity in his **Desperate Desmond** (1913). But these were forays into farce, mock heroic adventures that burlesqued popular melodrama.

COMIC STRIP CHARACTERS HELPED TO SELL MILLIONS OF PAPERS


POOR MAMA DE STROSE - IN HER GREAT FORTUNE ALMOST GONE - NOW A WILLING VICTIM TO THE WILES OF TOWNSEND ZANDER - FLEECED OUT OF HER LAST PIECE OF PROPERTY - (THOUGH SHE DOES NOT KNOW IT YET) HER JEWELS PAWNED, AND IN DEBT, ALL THROUGH THE TRICKS OF ARCH-FIEND ZANDER -
MARKS THE SPOT WHERE SHE USED TO WEAR THE BROOCH - THIS SUMMER SHE WILL WEAR A WORRIED LOOK INSTEAD -
THE SPIDER AND THE BUTTERFLY -
TOWNSEND ZANDER - KNEE-DEEP IN CREME AND MASQUERADING AS "COUNT BESSFORD" SPINS HIS WEB CLOSER AND CLOSER ABOUT THE LOVELY BUT HELPLESS BLOND MILLIE -
SIDNEY SMITH
7-3

THE GUMPS WAS THE FIRST REALISTIC

The stock characters of stage productions—stalwart and stolid heroes, beautiful and cringing damsels, moustache-twirling villains—were exaggerated and the cliff-hanger narrative mechanism similarly overdrawn for comic effect.

When Patterson began thinking about a new comic strip in early 1917, he envisioned something considerably more in touch with reality. And that's what he got—and then some. Once Sidney Smith warmed to his task, he soaped his stories with every sudsy bubble of melodrama he could lay his pen to.

Patterson wanted a strip about real people who would become involved in situations with which **Tribune** readers could identify. Doubtless in conceiving the strip, he harkened back to the novels he had written in his youth when influenced by the social realism of Theodore Dreiser. The strip would focus on an average lower middle class family—father, mother and children (one young son at home, one in the Navy, and a daughter in college; the elder offspring were mentioned in the strip's introduction, but Smith never brought them into his stories).

In its aspirations and adventures, the family would mirror the ambitions and appetites of the **Tribune**'s readers as Patterson imagined them. Patterson christened his family "the Gumps," employing a derisive term he and his sister Cissie had applied as children to loudmouth adults. In Andy Gump's case, the name was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Having conceived his new strip, Patterson looked for someone to produce it. It was probably the shortest talent search on record. In those early, unsophisticated days of comic strips, Patterson no doubt thought anybody who could draw cartoons could draw **The Gumps**, so he simply turned to the **Tribune**'s staff of cartoonists—which, at the time, was miniscule.

The Sunday comics section printed only four strips: In addition to **Hans and Fritz** (Patterson's favorite), there was **Mama's Angel Child** (by Penny Ross), **Bobby Make Believe** (Frank King) and **Old Doc Yak** (Sidney Smith's offering). Only **Yak** and a Clare Briggs' feature of rotating titles ("Ain't It a Grand and Glorious Feeling?," "They Can't Arrest You for That," "Days of Real Sport" and the like) ran in the daily paper.

Why Patterson picked Smith to do **The Gumps** is something of a mystery. **Old Doc Yak** certainly bore no resemblance to the kind of strip he imagined: a silly slapstick romp about a goat and his son, Yutch, it was about as far from Dreiser's gritty realism as vaudeville is from Shakespearean tragedy. Maybe Patterson merely elected to discontinue the strip that he liked least—in effect, reassigning the cartoonist to **The Gumps**. Or maybe he saw in Smith's goat strip an almost imperceptible quality that he felt Smith could translate effectively into the realization of Patterson's idea. Whatever the case, Smith got **the Gumps**, and he turned out to be an inspired choice.

ENTER, THE GUMPS

Before Smith introduced the Gumps to his readers, he devised an exit for Old Doc Yak. On Thursday, February 8, 1917, Smith announced to **Yak** readers that "Old Doc Yak has been served notice that if the rent for this space is not paid by Saturday, he and his son Yutch will have to leave this page and it will be rented to another party." Yak fails to come up with the rent, of course, and on Saturday, the landlord appears to confide: "Between you and me and the lampost, I was going to put him out anyway—whether he paid his rent or not—there's a new family goin' to move into this space on Monday." And on Monday the 12th, the Gumps are introduced.

The slender continuity of these last **Yuk** strips was continued through the following week, which featured jokes about the Gumps' moving in. But the strip was essentially a daily gag strip, its continuity derived entirely from the moving-in theme. In March, the daily gags perpetuated thematic continuity in Andy's on-going battle with a mouse in his new house. And so it went for the rest of this year and the next two.

Andy had mother-in-law troubles for days on end, went fishing on his vacation and railed in endless monologue against

THE GENIAL GENTLEMAN—ZANDER'S HENCHMAN, WHO POSED AS A PROSPECTIVE BUYER AND HELPED SWINDLE MAMA DE STROSS INTO PAWNING HER BROOCH AND SIGNING THE NOTE FOR $4,000 !!
TEN DAY NOTE FOR $4,000 !! SIGNED BY MAMA DE STROSS AND PAYABLE TO ZANDER ALIAS BESSFORD— NOW OVERDUE—
THE OPTION AND THE DEED—TWIN PAPERS LOOKING EXACTLY ALIKE—TRICKED BY A SPURIOUS PHONE CALL. MAMA SIGNED THE DEED INSTEAD OF THE OPTION— UNAWARE THAT SHE WAS GIVING THE PROPERTY TO ZANDER—

SOAP WAS EVERYWHERE— THE COMIC STRIP SERVED THE SAME FUNCTION THAT TV SERVES TODAY.

THE COUNT IS ON THE PHONE— HE'S ASKING ABOUT "THAT $4,000.00 NOTE—"
THAT'S ALL I WANT TO KNOW!
TELL HIM I'M NOT AT HOME— YOU TALK TO HIM—
BUT MOTHER, I DON'T TRUST THAT MAN— WHAT SHALL I SAY?

CONTINUITY STRIP

the minor evils and irritations of the world. Particularly at those that festered in the middle class mind: taxes, waste in government, the rising cost of living, women's fashions, food, family life, etc. His diatribes were often so heated as to inflate speech balloons to the size of eighty to a hundred words per balloon, a heroic accomplishment. But no story line emerged.

By January, 1920, Andy's rich Uncle Bim was on the scene, and there was much discussion of Bim's settling on little Chester Gump as his heir (with Andy's accompanying flights of fantasy at the prospect of being thereby enriched himself). But it wasn't until February of the following year that **The Gumps** began a strong narrative, a storyline that was continued suspensefully from day to day.

In February, 1921, Uncle Bim starts to fall into the clutches of the Widow Zander, a golddigging damsel whose marital intentions for Bim threaten Andy's hopes for fortune. The Widow Zander affair continued into 1922, and that year, Andy ran for Congress. Andy the blow-hard had found his *metier*, and Patterson and Smith had captured their audience.

By this time, people were asking newsdealers for "the Gump paper," not the **Tribune**. And the strip's vast popularity resulted in the **Tribune**'s monetary tribute to Smith's value—his celebrated million dollar contract of 1922.

Andy Gump's pedestrian interests and his opinionated trumpeting contributed a large measure to the rapidly growing appeal of the strip during its earliest years. But it was undoubtedly the Widow Zander continuity that sent the strip soaring into the public consciousness and made **The Gumps** (and buying the **Tribune** daily) a habit if not an addiction among its readers. Continuity as a device for building a successful comic strip had been established.

GOING TO EXTREMES

Smith played upon his readers' addiction mercilessly. He began to pull out all the stops of melodrama, and **The Gumps** stepped back several paces from reality. The villains, at first merely grasping, became heartless and vicious. The predicaments of the good folks became more and more pitiful, and Smith ladled on the purple prose: "And so Zander escapes again—through his lies and deceit, he has made another innocent man victim to an unjust fate. How long can this fiend's amazing luck hold out?" And, two days later: "Oh, Townsend Zander, could you but see this brave, pathetic little figure trudging down toward the cold, icy gray swamp, even your icy heart would be melted."

Smith milked the crises in the strip for every last dribble of suspense, slowing his plots by postponing developments for days. To keep suspense at hysterical heights during such interludes, Smith sometimes employed a maneuver unique for a comic strip: he would turn a day or two's strips into editorial cartoons, with the villain portrayed variously as a vulture preying on his victim, a hungry cat eyeing a bird (the heroine) in a birdcage, a spider waiting for the heroine-fly to wander into his web and so on.

Smith's artwork was crude by today's standards—his line often shaky, his compositions cluttered with cross-hatching as slap-dash as his plotting seemed. But his style, crude as it was, suited his subject, underscoring with its appearance the seamy ambiance of many of the stories. All of it—the melodramatic plots, the bathetic perils, the purple prose, the transparently mechanical prolonging of suspense—kept readers coming back for more.

The full dramatic potential of continuity would not be achieved until realistic illustration transformed the funnies pages in the 30s. But the operative principle of comic strip continuity as a mechanism for building suspense as well as newspaper circulation could not have received a more effective demonstration than the one Smith gave in **The Gumps**. CF

CREATING NEW LEGENDS AT DC

According to statements recorded in the March 21 issue of The Comic Buyer's Guide, DC Comics is launching a new miniseries, **Legends**.

"**Legends** is tied in with all the new DC series—plus the significant ongoing books. It is going to be a very crucial series," stated editor Mike Gold. "John Byrne will be drawing about 35 DC characters."

Mike Gold is the editor on the project to be written by Len Wein and John Ostrander and drawn by John Byrne.

OTHER DC NEWS

THE BATMAN—Frank Miller and Dave Mazzucchelli, late of **Daredevil**, will be doing a four-issue Batman story. In "Batman: Year One' the story of the first dramatic year of the dark avenger of the night will be retold. The book will replace **Batman** 402-405 in effect. Then Mike Barr and Alan Davis will focus on Batman's second year of crimefighting in a four issue miniseries entitled "Batman: Year Two." Yet another Batman project involves Alan Moore and Brian Bolland doing a graphic novel devoted to Batman and the Joker.

SUPERMAN— The Legend of Superman will be the first Superman miniseries of 1986. The title will introduce the changes that John Byrne is making on the character. Frequency will be every two weeks. While this series is appearing, in July and August, there will be no other Superman titles. After the completion of the miniseries a new **Superman** 1 will appear in September. It will be written and drawn by John Byrne and inked by DC editor-in-chief Dick Giordano. Additional Superman titles will continue to be published with Marv Wolfman and Jerry Ordway responsible for **The Adventures of Superman** and **Action Comics** assuming the role of the Superman teamup book. **The Adventures of Superman** will take over the numbering of the original series. Byrne will layout and write **Action**.

AND A FEW NEW ONES—The Justice League of America will be revamped. It has been redefined recently as "just another supergroup", which it was never meant to be. The JLA was created to be a gathering of the world's mightiest heroes. The new concept is that the team will be composed of the superheroes most needed for a specific job or series of jobs.

Wally West, formerly Kid Flash, now the Flash, is to receive his own book. While no villain that has ever faced the previous Flash(s) will reappear, it will be quite clear that the new Flash is aware that he is a third generation hero.

Yet another title involves The Suicide Squad. Whether this title has any connection with the earlier incarnation of that team or not has not been made public as of yet.

There will also be a new Wonder Woman series as previously announced and at least two other new titles. When all this takes place, the major DC heroes will have been completely changed as promised at the beginning of the **Crisis on Infinite Earths** series. Superman, Batman, Flash and Wonder Woman will all follow new paths. Green Lantern's concept and reason for being will be different, and the book will have a new title, **The Green Lantern Corps**. No other character that saw the birth of the Silver Age, launched by DC Comics in the mid-50s continues to helm a book.

HEROES

SPECIAL SECTION
THE FANTASTIC FOUR
SPIDER-MAN
THE X-MEN

25th

ANNIVERSARY
OF
MARVEL COMICS

MARVEL'S FLAGSHIP

If Superman revolutionized comic books in 1938, then **The Fantastic Four** changed the face of comics in the Sixties. It was the flagship book of the then new Marvel line of superhero comics.

Although on the surface the origin of the Fantastic Four seems quite simple, it has become shrouded over the years in claims and counter-claims. None were cleared up by Stan Lee's 1974 book, **Origins of Marvel Comics**, in which Lee claimed to have single-handedly created all of Marvel's most famous characters and then turned them over to someone such as Jack Kirby to draw as though he were a secondary cog in the creative machine.

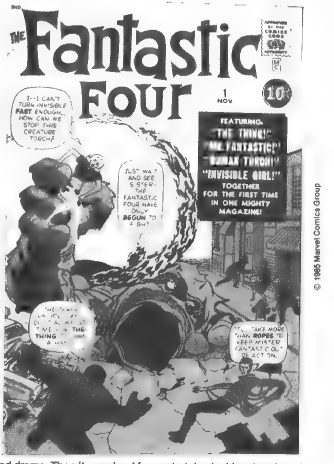
Jack Kirby drew the first 102 issues of the magazine (as well as several annuals) and to this day his stamp of creativity remains on the book, not like a ghost haunting every panel but rather as a spirit infusing it with life. When Kirby left the book in 1970, it was his approach that was imitated time and again, but the closest anyone could come was to recycle characters and villains which Kirby created during his long tenure on the series.

That Kirby was increasingly unhappy over the years with the way his efforts were acknowledged was a behind-the-scenes fact of life that did not come to light until he shocked Fandom by leaving Marvel for DC. Kirby at DC? Marvel without Jack Kirby? It was an impossible concept when you consider that in the early to mid-Sixties Kirby drew almost every single Marvel superhero comic series, including **Sgt. Fury** but excluding **Spider-Man.** This is when the chinks in Marvel's creative history first began to come to light.

In **The Rocket's Blast Comicollector #81** (an early comics fanzine), Jack Kirby was interviewed by Bruce Hamilton about why he switched to DC. "At DC I'm given the privilege of being associated with my own ideas. If I did come up with an idea at Marvel, they'd take it away from me and I lost all association with it. I was never given credit for the writing which I did. Most of the writing at Marvel is done by the artist from the script."

WHO CREATED THE FF? Regarding the Fantastic Four in particular, Kirby went on to say, "It was my idea. It was my idea to do it the way it was; my idea to develop it the way it was. I'm not saying that Stan had nothing to do with it. Of course he did. We talked things out. As things went on, I began to work at home and I no longer came up to the office. I developed all the stuff at home and just sent it in. I had to come up with new ideas to help the strip sell. I was faced with the frustration of having to come up with new ideas and then having them taken from me."

In **Origins of Marvel Comics**, Stan Lee describes the genesis of the series with Kirby waiting in the wings to accept the book as a *fait accompli* after all the really creative work was finished. Lee describes a meeting with Martin Goodman wherein Goodman suggested that a superhero team book would be a good idea since DC's **Justice League of America** was selling very well. Lee also wanted to do a comic book such as he himself would like to read, one where the characters would not have secret identities and would also have genuine human emotions. The closest Lee comes to giving Kirby any creative credit is when he says, "After kicking it around with Martin and Jack for awhile I decided to call our quaint quartet The Fantastic Four. I wrote a detailed first synopsis for Jack to follow, and the rest is history." Of his working relationship with Kirby, Lee explains, "I had only to give Jack an outline of a story and he would draw the entire strip, breaking down the outline into exactly the right number of panels replete with action


THE
Fantastic
Four
1
NOV.
10¢
FEATURING:
"THE THING!"
"MR. FANTASTIC!"
"HUMAN TORCH!"
"INVISIBLE GIRL!"
TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ONE MIGHTY MAGAZINE!
I-I CAN'T TURN INVISIBLE FAST ENOUGH... HOW CAN WE STOP THIS CREATURE TOUCH?
JUST WAIT AND SEE SUE-THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE BEGUN TO SHINE!
WE THINK WE CAN DEAL WITH THE THING!
IT TAKES MORE THAN ROPES TO KEEP MY FANTASTIC OL' BODY TIED!
© 1966 Marvel Comics Group

and drama. Then it remained for me to take Jack's artwork and add the captions and dialogue." This is not as simple as it sounds.

A comic book plot is generally a simple outline written on a couple sheets of paper. When an artist and writer have been working together for any length of time, the plot can consist of no more than what information is exchanged in a phone call. This is the "Marvel style" of writing. The artist is left to break the story down, establish how the conflict looks and add his own flourishes. In order to do this coherently, the artist must write notes on the border of the page of art and next to each panel describing the progression of the story. This often includes the dialogue so that the writer winds up just putting it in his own words. Whether the artist gets a co-author credit is often a behind-the-scenes struggle. In the case of Lee and Kirby this progressed to the point that Kirby was literally writing each book he drew and Lee just did the captions and dialogue (rewriting Kirby's words into his own) while still taking a full writing credit. This caused some unforseen problems for Kirby later as other writers looked forward to working with Jack and getting the same kind of sweetheart deal in which Kirby did the lion's share of the work.

That Lee had an important input cannot be disputed, even if it was just in rewriting Kirby's own captions and dialogue into a perhaps more dramatically satisfying form. This can be seen when

THE FANTASTIC FOUR

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comparing the Lee/Kirby comics with Kirby's solo books at DC. The visuals had the same impact but the writing style was markedly different. His strengths clearly lie in creating and plotting. In **Silver Star #1**, a 1983 title from Pacific Comics, one of Kirby's lines of dialogue reads: "Hey! Come on, mister big! Don't rattle your gonads in *my* ears!" How picturesque.

While in more recent years, Jack Kirby has been reluctant to discuss his early years at Marvel, in **The Spirit 39** ("Kitchen Sink," February 1983) Kirby once more dwells on his early creative years at Marvel in an interview conducted by Will Eisner. He describes his returning to Atlas in the late Fifties on a dark day when the company was contemplating going out of business, and that he urged Stan Lee to hold it together because he had some ideas he wanted to institute about bringing back superheroes which were on the wane at the time. Lee supposedly gave Kirby's ideas credence because Kirby had been a mover and shaker at Timely (which became Atlas which became Marvel) in the early Forties. Kirby is, after all, the co-creator of Captain America along with Joe Simon. What the interview fails to explore is why Kirby's ideas (which included Spider-Man) were not instituted until several years of monster books had foraged the newsstands under the Atlas imprint, books in which Kirby was the mainstay.

While there is no doubt that Kirby was a prime force in the creation of the Fantastic Four and perhaps the main force behind its most memorable issues, Stan Lee was an important force as well, although not quite the privotal voice of creation he makes himself out to be in **Origins of Marvel Comics**.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

The early issues of **Fantastic Four** show the raw creative energies at work, as well as not quite as much analysis as goes into a story today. Their origin consists of Reed Richards stealing a rocket which he'd overseen the construction of so that they can "beat the Commies into space." He needs Ben Grimm as a pilot but Sue comes along because of that "where you go, I go" chestnut and her kid brother Johnny accompanies them for the same reason. How scientific. For some reason the ship isn't shielded against cosmic rays and their exposure to them changes the foursome. Upon crash landing they each find they've been transformed. In one of the sillier moments of this scene, when Ben Grimm changes into an orange-skinned behemoth, he becomes so angry that he grabs a tree and breaks it off in his hands. But why would he have had any inkling he could even do this? It's not exactly your average reflex reaction. The only reason all this won-

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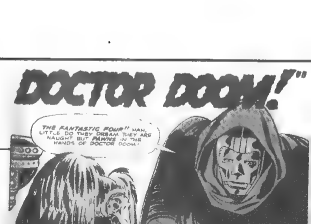
THE EARLY STORIES WERE FILLED WITH WONDERFUL HOKUM—AND AN ATMOSPHERE OF REAL DANGER



derful hokum works when you read it is because it happens quickly (unlike the wordy, overwritten panels in many Marvel Comics today). The artwork by Kirby is strangely atmospheric, certainly much different even than the monster books he'd been drawing at the time and different from the way his work would change over the years. It has a very menacing air about it. They were certainly not trying to imitate a DC comic.

The second issue of FF introduced the Skrulls from outer space in a plotline which was picked up in a later Fantastic Four annual. Issue four revived the Sub-Mariner, a popular character in Timely Comics of the Forties. But issue five introduced their quintessential nemesis—Doctor Doom. There was a furious imagination at work in those early issues as that single issue not only introduced Dr. Doom, gave a capsule origin, but also had the Fantastic Four forced to undertake a mission back in time—and it was all perfectly balanced. There was an art then in telling a story in a single issue, and leaving the reader satisfied. It had tension, suspense and a fast-paced plot. In issue 6 Dr. Doom returned in a team-up with the Sub-Mariner. Namor returned in number 9 and Dr. Doom returned in number ten, and yet you enjoyed how these return engagements were handled. There was a freshness about them rather than having them seem as if they just didn't have any better ideas. The people producing these comics actually seemed to like what they were doing, and on a monthly basis. You could tell that they looked forward to writing and drawing the next issue as much as we looked forward to reading it.

One of the nagging secrets in the FF over the years is what Dr. Doom looks like under his mask. While Darth Vader's true appearance was revealed in **Return of the Jedi**, Dr. Doom's true likeness will doubtless remain shrouded in mystery, at least within the pages of the comic. Jack Kirby has always been free with the facts about the good Doctor. "Dr. Doom was a perfectionist. Dr. Doom was a handsome guy and he had to hide his face in a steel mask because he had a scratch on his face. He couldn't stand that scratch." One wonders if he had never heard of plastic surgery. At a convention some years ago, Jack Kirby did a drawing of Doom without his mask and it was indeed a man with a small scratch on his cheek. Some fans believed that Doom bore an uncanny likeness to Stan Lee but Kirby denied any such intent towards resemblance.

A TORRENT OF CREATIVITY Those first few years of the FF featured a creative explosion incomparable in any other comic book title. The first 67 issues saw the birth of such characters as the Skrulls, Dr. Doom, Puppet Master, The Watcher, the Red Ghost and his super apes, the Mad Thinker, Dragon Man, Diablo, the Inhumans, the Black Panther, Galactus, the Silver Surfer, Klaw, the Frightful Four and the strange being Him (who under other hands became known as Warlock.) Then the torrent ceased. One could sense an unseen hand turning off the flow. After issue 67 no new major characters were created. It just became a revolving cycle of appearances by old characters such as Dr. Doom, Galactus, the Silver Surfer and yet another Thing-on-the-rampage story. Kirby was holding back and it was clearly evident that this was so. He was obviously tired of creating something and not only watching Stan Lee take the bows but seeing Marvel absorb the character into their widening stable of successful Jack Kirby creations. So Kirby put on the brakes, did good work, but did not give the book that extra creative juice which had boosted it to popularity over the years, and the most telling aspect of all this is that Stan Lee was unable to pick up that slack or infuse the book with new major characters of his own. 'Nuff said.

IN KIRBY'S AFTERMATH When Kirby left the book, the word came down that the FF must still have the Kirby look. The problem was that in imitating the art they neglected to imitate the necessary creativity, if such is even possible. So the years went by with a round robin of writers and artists doing pretty much what Kirby himself had done during his last three years on the title. There were glimmers of interest over the years but under the

almost constant inks of Joe Sinnott (who did such a wonderful job inking Kirby), all the art looked the same and any character which might have been brought to the book by a different penciller was submerged under Sinnott's inks. Even when George Perez (whose work on DC's **Teen Titans** book has made him one of the most popular artists in comics today) drew the FF back around '77, Sinnott did not ink to bring out Perez's strengths in drawing but rather to make it look like Joe Sinnott art, including having the male characters constantly gnashing their teeth (i.e. **FF number 186**, page six, panel seven, as well as many others in the same issue). The stuff had not only begun to look alike long before this, it *was* alike. Even distinctly non-Kirby stylists like Bill Sienkiewicz had their art transformed into ersatz Kirby under the inks of Joe Sinnott.

Then came **FF number 232.**

John Byrne, who as a child discovered the FF with their pivotal issue number five, became disenchanted with Chris Claremont on the **X-Men** and decided to look elsewhere for a book where he could stretch creatively. What he settled on was the FF, which is still Marvel's flagship title. Byrne had drawn the FF a couple of years prior to this latest stint on it but he was not satisfied with the stories or his art. Once again those earlier issues had been inked by Joe Sinnott and that special frission found in Byrne's art was nowhere to be seen.

SWEEPING CHANGES This time Byrne approached the FF with a much stronger idea of what he wanted to do and this was heavily influenced by the feelings he had carried away from those early Lee/Kirby issues. His goal was to not only infuse the book with the same sort of energetic atmosphere of those early years, but to once more bring change and growth to the title, something which had been absent. The FF had long been a victim of recurring plot twitches such as losing their powers only to regain them one way or another a couple issues later. This has been done so often that whenever it reappears it's, "Oh, no, not this plot again!" Byrne has been very successful at capturing the feel of excitement of those early days although he has fallen victim to the Galactus syndrome. Another cliche has been to return Galactus, who must absorb the energies of Earth to live, only to have him bamboozled into leaving at the end of the story. He marked time with yet another one of those. Ho hum. Galactus, like most cosmic characters, became dull quickly because what can you do with him which hasn't been done already except to kill him?

One of the best of these earlier stories was "Terror in a Tiny Town" in number 236; an amazingly effective story whose plot was borrowed uncredited from the Frederik Pohl science fiction story "Tunnel Under the World."

Byrne's writing on this title has been remarkably good considering he had little previously credited (outside of co-plotting the **X-Men**), other than **Marvel Two-in-One number 50**, a sad attempt at scripting a nostalgic Sixties-style story which took a terrific idea and squandered it by having a silly ten-page fight scene in a 17-page story.

Some previous writers of the FF, such as Len Wein and Marv Wolfman, have complained that Byrne is making too many sweeping changes by doing things such as summarily transporting the Great Refuge of the Inhumans to the blue area of the Moon. This is the whole point. The comic has been stagnant and predictable for a decade and Byrne is striving to change this, and succeeding. I've been reading the FF since number 13 and I like what I see these days. When a comic has dubbed itself "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine!" as long as this one has, it's about time that it did something to earn it rather than resting on the laurels of what Jack Kirby did almost fifteen years ago.

THE END OF AN ERA John Byrne suddenly left the FF with issue 293, about five years after he began his highly successful tenure on the title. His departure was sudden and unexplained in light of the fact that just a month before Marvel had published an interview with Byrne in their house organ **Marvel Age** in which Byrne talked at length about his plans for FF 296—the 25th anniversary issue. Those plans were quickly altered and the issue was instead changed so that it was plotted by Jim Shooter and written by Stan Lee with several artists handling the art chores—artists who've had little or no connection with the title in the past. What was promoted as a major event seems to be destined to be an anticlimax. Jerry Ordway took over the art chores on FF with issue 294 with Roger Stern handling the writing.

Byrne had remained on the title for five years, longer than any other creative team had since Kirby left the title. He had announced his intention to break Kirby's record on the title, a plan apparently discarded due to behind-the-scenes events. Byrne didn't just quit the title, he left Marvel altogether.

Since probably no one likes the She-Hulk as much as Byrne does, it is safe to assume that she will soon depart. Issue 296 will return The Thing to the pages of the book after his prolonged absence. What the future holds for this title is anybody's guess, but it's unlikely that a creative spirit as strong and energetic as Byrne's will infuse the strip anytime soon. I'd like to be proven wrong, but I see nothing in the title's nearly 300 issue run to make me believe that any such pleasant surprises are in store in the near future. **CF**

HEROES A DIFFERENT BREED

It was the dawn of the Marvel Age and the birth of the one character who would come to symbolize Marvel Comics more than any other.

If one had to pick the quintessential hero of the Sixties, it would be Spider-Man. Peter Parker, with his turbulent personal life, naked introspection and constant self-doubts, epitomized what the nation as a whole went through during the decade. The fact that this approach to the character predated the youthful turmoil that soon followed meant that the young readers of the comic had found someone who reflected their own anxieties. Parker put into words what many of those readers could not articulate—the uneasiness of growing up and attempting to grapple with often cruel realities.

While the hero/villain was by no means new, Spider-Man was a different breed. Whereas characters like the Spider and the Green Hornet were sought by the police even while they battled crime, those heroes never agonized over that cruel dichotomy the way Spider-Man did. They never tried to turn the public's perception of them around (to no avail) the way Spider-Man did. They went about their business, while Spidey cursed an unfair and remorseless fate.

Though created by Stan Lee, there were several other hands that helped shape him and made him unique in the Marvel stable of heroes.

Even while Marvel was introducing their unique brand of super-hero to the comic book scene, they were still publishing many of the same kinds of books they had been producing for years. Namely weird fantasy comics. These included **Journey into Mystery, Tales to Astonish, Tales of Suspense** and a recent addition to the lineup, **Amazing Adult Fantasy**. The earliest issues of this short-lived title had included a pre-Doctor Strange fantasy hero named Dr. Droom (reprinted Dr. Druid in reprint form 15 years later). But for the most part it featured weird adventure stories by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. In fact, within a short time, Ditko was drawing all of the stories and to fine effect. Late in its short life the title was changed from **Amazing Adult Fantasy** to **Amazing Fantasy**. The **Twilight Zone**-style morality tale was still emphasized, though. But then, no one could communicate pathos better than Steve Ditko. The fifteenth and final issue of this title introduced Spider-Man.

The Jack Kirby cover is probably one of the most recognizable in comics and homage was paid to it on **Spider-Man #252** when the all-black Spidey uniform made its premiere.

SPIDER BITE! In **Origins of Marvel Comics**, Stan Lee recalled the creation of this soon to be star of the Marvel universe. "For quite a while I'd been toying with the idea of doing a strip that would violate all the conventions—break all the rules. A strip that would actually feature a teenager as the star, instead of making him an (ugh!) adult hero's sidekick. A strip in which the main character would lose out as often as he'd win—in fact more often. A strip in which nothing would progress according to formula—the situations, the cast of characters and their relationship to each other would all be unusual and unexpected. Yep, I knew what I wanted all right, but where would I ever get a chance to try it? Where—except in a magazine that we were planning to kill anyway?

"What about the name?" Lee continued. "Why Spider-Man? Simple. In the long-dead, practically Paleolithic era when I had been on the verge of approaching teenagerhood, one of my favorite pulp magazine heroes was a stalwart named The Spider. He wore a slouch hat and a finger ring with the image of an arachnid—a ring which, when he punched a foe fearlessly in the face, would leave its mark—an impression of a spider. It was The Spider's calling card, and it sent goose pimples up and down my ten-year old spine. More than that, I can still remember how the magazine's subtitle grabbed me. It was called **The Spider** but after his name were the never-to-be-forgotten words: **Master of Men.** Just to play with that for a moment—roll it around on your tongue, savor the fateful, fascinating flavor—**The Spider, Master of Men.** My mind was made up, the stage was set, the cards had been dealt. I was no more than a puppet in the shadow show of destiny."

BUT ALAS, OTHER TEEN-AGERS CAN SOMETIMES, UNWITTINGLY, BE SO VERY CRUEL TO A SHY YOUNG MAN...
SALLY, I, EH, WAS WONDERING IF YOU'RE BUSY, TONIGHT...?
PETER, FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME, YOU'RE JUST NOT MY TYPE...
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Lee discussed the idea with his publisher, Martin Goodman, but Goodman pointed out that most people didn't like spiders. Lee explained how he'd loved the old **Spider** pulp magazine in his youth and hoped to infuse the strip with the same sort of reader enthusiasm.

Lee approached Jack Kirby to do the strip. That was only proper as Kirby was a natural for super-heroes and had already been carrying off the Fantastic Four and The Hulk quite successfully. Lee explained that he wanted Spider-Man to look less heroic, like a normal person wearing a costume, not the handsome or graceful square-jawed hero he was accustomed to

SPIDER-MAN
...NOT WHEN DREAM BOATS LIKE FLASH THOMPSON ARE AROUND!
I ADMIRE YOUR GOOD TASTE, DOLL! GET LOST, BOOKWORM!
© 1965 Marvel Comics Group
LOOK, THERE'S A GREAT NEW EXHIBIT AT THE SCIENCE HALL TONIGHT! WOULD ANY OF YOU LIKE TO GO WITH ME?
SCIENCE HALL! HAH!
YOU STICK TO SCIENCE, SON! WE'LL TAKE THE CHICKS!
YES, FOR SOME, BEING A TEEN-AGER HAS MANY HEART-BREAKING MOMENTS!
SEE YOU AROUND, BOOKWORM!
GIVE OUR REGARDS TO THE ATOM-SMASHERS, PETER!
SOME DAY I'LL SHOW THEM! SOME DAY THEY'LL BE SORRY! --SORRY THAT THEY LAUGHED AT ME!
SCIENCE EXHIBIT
EXPERIMENTS IN RADIO-ACTIVITY
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

DITKO DREW LIVELY, VERY DISTINCT CHARACTERS— HIS SPIDER-MAN WAS NOT LARGER THAN LIFE. IN FACT, IT OFTEN SEEMED UNCOMFORTABLY CLOSE TO LIFE.

doing, Kirby took the assignment, but Lee was unhappy with the initial pages. Kirby just could not deglamorize the concept enough. So while Kirby had designed the costume (and thus the cover as well), the strip was then turned over to Steve Ditko.

Ditko had not exactly been known for superheroes up to this point. In fact from his first work in comics in 1955 up to doing Spider-Man in 1963, he had almost exclusively drawn mystery and science fiction stories. Superheroes are something else again. But then Lee didn't want this to be a standard hero by any stretch of the imagination. What Ditko gave him was pure magic.

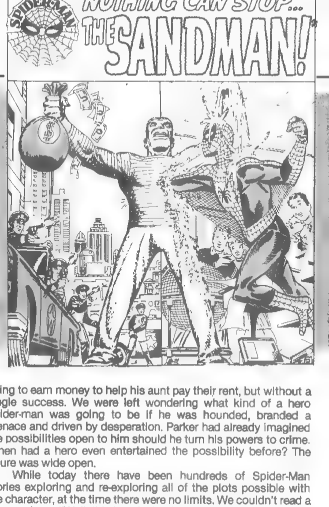
"After Spidey's premiere appearance in **Amazing Fantasy #15**," Lee recalled, "the book was dropped and we all forgot about it. I'd gotten the Spider-Man character out of my system and could now go back to our other superstars."

THE AMAZING SPIDER-STAR But then the sales reports came in. The book had been a best seller, and Spider-Man had to be the reason. Lee met with Martin Goodman and the character was given a rebirth in its own magazine.

The things which Ditko did with this title alienated some people then, and apparently a lot of newer fans now (the Ditko reprints of those classics are not met with enthusiasm by the modern young collector. This isn't the Spider-Man they know. It's too different. It looks "old." The art is ugly. Why isn't it by John Byrne? Most of the newer fans probably didn't even realize that **Spider-Man Annual #18** is in pacing and layout identical in approach to a Ditko Spider-Man. Even the art is a clear homage to Ditko, albeit with the slick sheen the Eighties fan comes to expect in a Marvel comic.)

What Ditko did was draw Spider-Man so that it wasn't larger than life. In fact it often seemed uncomfortably close to life. New York was never gloomier or grittier than when drawn by Ditko, but for anyone who knows New York, that's what its like. These characters lived in a real world. Each panel didn't glitter with some slick new look such as Kirby gave his books. But then this was only right. The Fantastic Four were wealthy. Peter Parker lived with his aunt.

In the origin story and in the early issues of the magazine, Peter Parker was an ordinary looking high school student. He was a bookworm with geeky glasses. But by page three he'd been bitten by a radioactive spider and in no time flat he'd made his own costume and even invented his web-shooters and web fluid. In 11 pages he'd achieved fame but lost his Uncle Ben to a hood he could have stopped if his sudden fame hadn't made him too arrogant to want to bother. Thus was born a hero driven by a guilt he could never expunge. His uncle would not have died had he acted when he had the chance. (The element came full circle in **Spider Man #200** when the burglar finally died, frightened into a



heart attack by his fear of Spider-man).

While there are many true-blue fans who go back and reread the first 38 issues and the first two annuals with great fondness, I daresay that most of today's readers of **Spider-Man** find little to relate to in those Steve Ditko issues. This is because Ditko was a different kind of artist to have picked for this book, and he delivered something unique. Look at **Spider-Man** today. It is virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the comics on the newsstand. This is because Spider-Man is successful and one doesn't mess with success. So when Steve Ditko left the book he was replaced by John Romita, who is not exactly mister originality in his approach to art. He is a slick, competent but unexciting craftsman and the book has been drawn by many of those over the intervening years. But that's not what established Spider-Man.

Steve Ditko's art (as well as his plotting and a lot of uncredited writing) drew us into the world of Peter Parker and the rest. Its earthy, straightforward approach, along with the stories, made it a strip much easier to identify with than any other being done. Other comics may have been flashier and prettier, but Spider-Man was more real.

OVER THE EDGE With the first issue of his regular magazine, Marvel made Spider-Man something apart. Lee succeeded in making Spider-Man someone who tried to do his best, only to see things turn out wrong. J. Jonah Jameson immediately branded Spider-Man a menace when all he was doing was appearing as a performer, thus ruining his income. When Spidey saved Jonah's astronaut son, he was branded a criminal who had staged the whole incident. When he fought the Chameleon, who had committed a crime disguised as Spider-Man, he found himself having to escape the police when they believed him to be the Chameleon as well. At the conclusion of the story we see a young man who had failed and who was at the bottom of the heap even though he had powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. He'd even spent the whole issue trying to earn money to help his aunt pay their rent, but without a single success. We were left wondering what kind of a hero Spider-man was going to be if he was hounded, branded a menace and driven by desperation. Parker had already imagined the possibilities open to him should he turn his powers to crime. When had a hero even entertained the possibility before? The future was wide open.

While today there have been hundreds of Spider-Man stories exploring and re-exploring all of the plots possible with the character, at the time there were no limits. We couldn't read a story and say, "Well, this is only the third time he's done this. Ho hum. . ." Each issue had an atmosphere of exploration and discovery. Would Spider-Man be pushed over the edge? Wouldn't we in the same circumstances? While readers may have imagined themselves as the Human Torch or The Flash, Peter Parker's life was uncomfortably close to home; his worries uncomfortably close to ours.

Even then some fans found Ditko's art crude because when had they ever seen a "realistic" super-hero strip? The characters weren't all handsome and the locales weren't all sleek like a Carmine Infantino city. It looked like the places we lived and the people we knew. The comic was definitely like nothing we'd ever seen before.

With the second issue the continuing adventures started being brought more into focus. Despite the brooding, threatening ending of the first issue, here he came up with his job idea—selling photos to Jameson. He sold enough photos of the Vulture to pay his aunt's rent for a year with money left over.

As with the first issue, this one featured two stories. The first introduced the Vulture in a clever and interesting story. The only drawback is that, like Mr. Fantastic, Peter Parker cobbled together an electronic doohicky to defeat the garishly garbed felon while knowing nothing about how the Vulture flew. I guess with some people a deduction can go a long way.

The second story in the issue was a cross between a super-hero story and something you'd expect to find in the old **Tales to**

THE STRANGEST FOE OF ALL TIME...
SPIDER-MAN VERSUS
DOCTOR OCTOPUS
DOCTOR OCTOPUS HAS TENTACLES WHERE HIS ARMS USED TO BE!
HE'S ALSO THE HUMAN TORCH!
FANTASY! THRILLS!
STORY BY: LOU STATHIS
ART BY: STEVE DITKO

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Astonish. Spidey stumbles onto a nest of aliens (and I don't mean the Latino variety) and foils their invasion plans. Even the conclusion is in keeping with the old bizarre twist at the end bit. And drawn by Ditko it was even more effective.

Issue three introduced probably the most popular Marvel villain next to Dr. Doom—Doctor Octopus! This first booklength story of Spidey has some of the most dynamic graphics Ditko has ever done. Much is done with contrasting lights and shadows whenever Dr. Octopus is seen. Even in black and white this story is extremely effective and is one of those books which demonstrates the power of comic book storytelling when handled by a master. Another strength of this and other early issues is the use of captions only when necessary. Instead of cluttering up a page with overly wordy captions such as most comics do today, this issue shows the strength of using only the amount of words necessary. This lack of captions is all important to the strength and pacing of the story.

AMAZING ADVENTURE These early issues showed Marvel Comics at the height of its creative form. In issue #4 he met the Sandman, an oddball villain if there ever was one and, like the Hulk, the product of a man getting caught in an atomic blast.

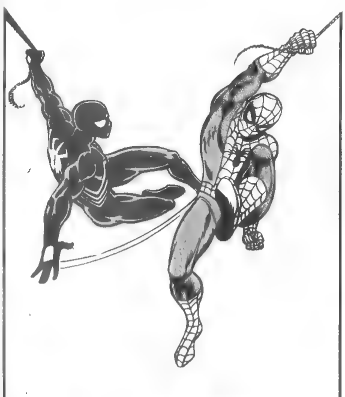
In issue #5 he faced Dr. Doom, in a story which was a sequel to **Fantastic Four** no. 17. The FF even make an appearance at the end. **Spider-Man** went monthly with no. 4 and for a few issues Ditko's art wasn't as slick as it was on the first three issues, as though he couldn't spend as much time inking it. But it was still fine work.

One reason the newer, younger fans of Spider-Man can't warm up to these classic issues is that, other than Aunt May and Jameson, the supporting cast is almost entirely different. Peter is in High School and Flash Thompson, the ultimate jock, is the bane of his existence. Plus Peter is always having misunderstandings with Liz, a girl he likes, as well as pining away for Betty Brant, an "older Woman" and Jameson's secretary. All of these characters and relationships were resolved over 15 years ago in the comic book, before most of the current readers were even born. So while some new fans can't warm up to Steve Ditko's art, the stories are probably just as much the reason that **Marvel Tales** actually sells better when it reprints more recent issues of **Spider-Man**.

While most of Spidey's adventures take place in New York (which must have been declared a disaster area years ago because of all the super-villians who lay waste to sections of it periodically), issue #6 sent Peter Parker on assignment to Florida where he could investigate the mysterious being called The Lizard. This is the type of story Marvel did quite well back then, wherein the villain is not responsible for his actions. Curt Conners, in trying to grow a new arm, instead becomes a human lizard when his formula derived from reptile enzymes backfires on him. This time instead of a gizmo, Spidey whips up a concoction which returns Connors to normal. The Lizard has returned over the years but never as poignantly portrayed as he was in the original appearance when we saw him slowly losing his humanity and reacting to his family. The story is somewhat reminescent of the old film **The Alligator People**.

Number seven featured the return of the Vulture, but it was issue eight where obvious changes began. Peter Parker had gradually started looking less geeky and more handsome over the months. On page two of the story when his glasses are broken, he's clearly not the same ugly guy we saw in the origin story. I guess getting bitten by radioactive spiders clears up vision problems as well as your complexion.

The second story in #8 (the last time they'd do this during the Ditko years), showed us what Spider-Man might have looked like had Kirby been the book's artist. It's just a plotless little exercise in which Spidey meets the FF again. Although inked by Ditko, Spidey's eyepieces on the mask are very small, and while the art is very good, Spider-Man just doesn't move with the same grace that Ditko infused him with. Also, Kirby's people tend to all look very similar (and very handsome) whereas Ditko can really



A TALE OF 2 COSTUMES

In the first **Secret Wars** mini-series, Spider-Man's costume was destroyed in battle and a fantastic machine created a new one which was completely different from his original costume—in more ways than one. This new costume, as it turned out, was actually alive and proved to be a menace. But afterwards Spider-Man retained the design and recently has employed it in the storyline of all three monthly Spider titles.

But this does not mean that the old red and blue costume is a thing of the past. All Spider-Man merchandising uses the original costume and the daily and Sunday newspaper strip, written by Stan Lee, has never used anything *but* the original costume. This makes Spider-Man the only comic book character who is currently using two different costumes at once. Welcome to the Marvel Age of Confusion!

WHAT ROUND WILL YOU FINISH HIM OFF IN, FLASH?
I'LL REFEREE THE FIGHT, BOYS! ARE YOU BOTH READY?
YOU MEAN WHAT MINUTE OF THE FIRST ROUND!
POOR PARKER! NOT ONE STUDENT IS ROOTING FOR HIM! I WISH, BY SOME MIRACLE, THAT HE COULD-- BUT NO, HE HASN'T A CHANCE!
YOU GONNA TIE ONE HAND BEHIND YOU, FLASH BOY?
I AVOID FLASH'S SWINGS SO FAST THAT THE OTHERS THINK I'M JUST STAYING OUT OF RANGE! MY REFLEXES ARE TOO GOOD!
STAYING OUT OF FLASH'S REACH!

Peter Parker finally stands up for himself in Issue 8. These early stories were a mix of drama, adventure and humor. They were satisfying and fun to read.

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draw some unusual and very dissimilar looking characters when he puts his mind to it. And he really put his mind to it in his Spider-Man days. You couldn't mistake one person for another in Ditko's Spider-Man!

One oddity about these early issues is that the color of Spider-Man's costume kept changing. One issue it would be blue and red and the next it would be purple and red. I always found the purple, and a deep purple it was, a more interesting combination with the red, webbed portion.

CLASSIC WEB RIDES The Ditko years introduced characters and stories which would shape the future of the title. Issue fourteen introduced The Green Goblin without giving us an origin or secret identity. This did not come for a long time. There wasn't even a good suspect. Issues 17-19 were the first time, and the most effective, that Peter Parker quit being Spider-Man. What made this work so well is that the uncredited writing by Ditko captured a much truer sense of despair and alienation than Lee did by himself. The turbulant feelings expressed by the characters seemed much truer to life than the same things attempted by Lee alone beginning in **Spider-Man** 39.

By **Spider-Man** 37, Ditko's art had tightened up and smoothed out again so that the inking looked much more slick than it had back around Issue 7. This is the issue which introduced the Scorpion, who made an interesting reappearance in **Spider-Man Annual** 18. The Scorpion marked the first, but not the last, time Jameson paid to have something created that would defeat Spider-Man. In doing so, he unleashed a worse menace. In issue 25 he paid to have a robot programmed to chase and capture the hero, and it worked. Issue 28, which sports one of the most effective covers in the series, introduced the Molten Man and featured Peter Parker's high school graduation. Real changes took place in the series after this including the fading away of personalities who had been major supporting characters up to

C'MON AND FIGHT, CHICKEN, PARKER!
I'LL PULL MY PUNCH AS MUCH AS I CAN NOW... HE DOESN'T REALIZE THAT TO ME HE SEEMS TO BE MOVING IN SLOW MOTION!
HOLY COW! DID YOU SEE THAT?!?
I'M NOT SURE! IT HAPPENED SO FAST, IT WAS LIKE A BLUR TO ME!
THERE! I PUT ONLY THE SMALLEST FRACTION OF MY POWER INTO THAT BLOW!
WHAM!
© 1985 Marvel Comics Group

that time, such as Liz Allen and Flash Thompson. High school was over, and as is the case with such things, people tended to go their separate ways.

In issues 31-33 we saw what is probably the best continued story the series has presented. While Aunt May getting sick was already a recurring motif by this time, it was handled most skillfully in this story, especially when Spider-Man has to take on Dr. Octopus and his gang to get the serum that will save her. These three issues contain the quintessential elements which made Spider-Man and Marvel what it was in the Sixties.

The first two Spider-Man annuals (in 1964 & 1965) featured stories which really pulled out all the stops. In the first annual Spider-Man took on virtually all of his major foes up to that time in a real feast of Ditko excellence. It also introduced the bizarre subplot of Aunt May liking Dr. Octopus and thinking him a wonderful gentleman. The second annual guest-starred Ditko's other masterfully wrought character, Dr. Strange. For sheer excellence, these specials would not be approached for many years to come.

The last Ditko **Spider-Man** was number 38. His final issues were relatively average fare, as though Ditko was just marking time.

A NEW ERA In number 39 the Green Goblin returned, captured Spider-Man and unmasked him in a story so good we were not supposed to notice that Ditko was gone. Instead, it only made us wonder how special it would have looked had Ditko drawn it instead of John Romita. Romita did a credible job on Spider-Man for a few issues, but then the book started looking rushed and not as carefully thought out. Plus the stories lacked the depth they'd had under Ditko, which was the real revelation of how much he had contributed to the series.

It seems that nearly everyone has drawn Spider-Man over the years since Ditko left. One of the best jobs was by Gil Kane, who brings a special atmosphere to any book he draws.

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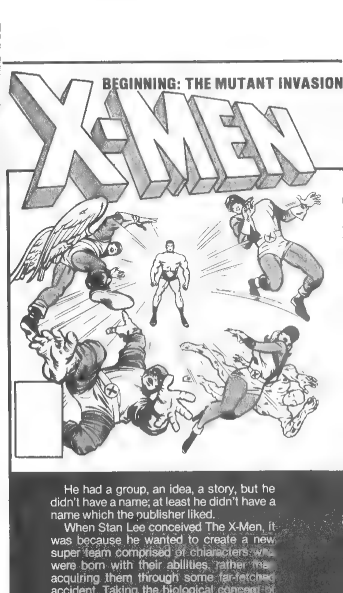

He had a group, an idea, a story, but he didn't have a name; at least he didn't have a name which the publisher liked.

When Stan Lee conceived The X-Men, it was because he wanted to create a new super team comprised of characters who were born with their abilities, rather than acquiring them through some far-fetched accident. Taking the biological concept of the mutant, something which shows a variation not found in its parents, Stan had come up with a new direction that he had been looking for. He'd even settled on a title for the book: the **Mutants**. The only problem was that then-publisher Martin Goodman thought it was too obscure a word and that the little kids who bought comic books wouldn't understand what it meant. Lee's arguments—that there was a wider audience that he was aiming at while still retaining the interest of the pubescent brigade—fell on deaf ears. Examining what a mutant was, he defined it as having something extra. A mutant could be considered as being an extraordinary human,

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HEROES

Marvel has always tried to celebrate special issues with special stories. In number 50, Spider-Man quit and hung up his costume again. In issue 100 they came up with the especially silly notion of having him grow four extra arms (this grotesque idea, mercifully, only lasted three issues).

Spider-Man, of course, has become a virtual industry unto himself, what with the magazines **Amazing Spider-Man, Marvel Tales, Web of Spider-Man** and **Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man** appearing every month. He is to Marvel what Superman is to DC. He's everywhere. The overexposure, while bringing more opportunities for good writers to depict the character, has diluted his quality.

Some recent annuals have been good, though. Annual 13 featuring Dr. Octopus, was written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by John Byrne and Terry Austin. Annuals 14 & 15 were both by Frank Miller. While Byrne drew Spider-Man his own way (which was fine), Miller brought a touch of Ditko to his layouts and designs. Annual 14 guest-starred Dr. Strange. Annual 18 went even further in capturing the Ditko flair, even to often using the nine-panel pages which many of Ditko's **Spider-Man** employed. The art is a cross between Ditko-style touches and the slick look of most modern comics.

Nostalgia has been a popular springboard for Spider-Man stories. In **What If?** 46, ("What if Spider-Man's Uncle Ben had Lived?"), the art drips with atmospheric Ditko *homages*. It captures the feel of of the Sixties Spider-Man quite well for that, written by Peter Gillis and drawn by Ron Frenz and Sam DeLaRosa. Another one, much shorter but just as good from every angle, appeared in **Spider-Man 248**, "The Kid Who Collects Spider-Man!" Drawn by Frenz and Terry Austin and written by Roger Stern, it's a touching and blatantly manipulative story. Yet, after reading it, you wish it was longer (and that it really happened).

Frank Miller did his usual fine job on Spider-Man once again in **Marvel Team-Up 100**, which co-starred the Fantastic Four. The story by Miller and Chris Claremont is unusually good and the art is wonderful, especially the splash page which instantly hurls us older fans back 20 years because it looks like pure Ditko. No one has left a mark on the character the way Ditko has.

The biggest news involving Spider-Man recently was of course his new, all-black costume which premiered in number 252 (although its origin wasn't seen until six months later in **Secret Wars 8**).

Spider-Man is so ubiquitous that it's sometimes difficult to decide what to make of him. For instance, the Spider-Man newspaper strip has been running successfully for several years now, but the stories seem set in a completely different universe from the books. When the Kingpin's wife was crippled in the strip and the rotund criminal blamed himself, this aspect never appeared anywhere in Marvel Comics. In fact, a totally different use of the Kingpin's (perfectly healthy) wife was made by Frank Miller in **Daredevil**. The two stories never matched up.

And of course there was a Spider-Man live-action tv show a few years back, as well as two different cartoon shows. He gets around. But it seems that, for all of the different versions of him that there are, there are fans who prefer that one over the others. The best stories seem to happen when the current creative talent, who in most cases were little kids 20 years ago, reach back to the formative period of the comic when raw talent and fresh ideas emerged in each and every issue. That's when the stories catch fire and Spider-Man lives up to his legend.

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or in commercial comic books shorthand, an X-man.

This gave the book an air of mystery which probably helped it when it first appeared in the summer of '63, although the fact that it appeared on the stands along with **Avengers 1** and the first **Fantastic Four** annual couldn't have hurt either.

While the first issue was certainly interesting, and the introduction of Magneto (who has been to the X-Men what Dr. Doom has been to the Fantastic Four) made for a great start, what with Kirby's striking costume design, the book just wasn't as different as it seemed. It didn't take too discerning a fan to realize that the characters were offshoots of the F.F. Instead of a flaming character, there was an icy one. There was even a homely, super-strong character who used a lot of slang, as well as a super-intelligent group leader. But fans quickly picked up on something else as well. The X-Men were conceived around late '62, about the time that DC published **My Greatest Adventure 80** which introduced "The Doom Patrol," strange characters (although *not* mutants) who'd been brought together by a mysterious wheelchair-bound genius. The coincidence seemed a little too close, although no more was done or said about that than was said years later when DC introduced The Swamp Thing right after Marvel did the Man-Thing. These things happen.

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SILVER AGE

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF MARVEL COMICS HISTORY

1961—August of 1961 sees a new sort of superhero emerge. This hero has dark spots on his soul and a tendency to respond with the same anger and intemperance that a normal man might express when backed to the wall by crazed fate. The misshapen Thing, most colorful of the Fantastic Four, is indeed something new under the sun.

In the first panel of the first Fantastic Four story, a crowd of people points with fear toward the name of the group written with smoke in the sky. Each subsequent individual appearance of the characters also elicits fear and awe. The Thing smashes his way out of a store and seeks cover in the sewer when police fire on him. He exits by punching his own opening through the street above, whereupon a car crashes into him. "Fool!" he shouts. "Did you not *see* me in time?"

In the origin we see that they were stricken with their fearsome powers when they stole an experimental rocketship which Reed Richards had constructed and refused to wait for official clearance to use. These people *seem* dangerous. On the opening page of the first issue's second story, Richards explains that he has some pictures to show the others. The Thing asks, "What are they, pin-ups?" This is an angry, bitter man, and certainly unlike any hero seen in comics up to 1961. The Thing was dangerous. It was as if the only thing allying him with these three other strange souls was a veiled threat.

In the early issues of **The Fantastic Four**, we see four common people gradually become well-known. Perhaps it is the pressure of this sudden notoriety, coupled with being more (and less) than human, that causes the constant in-fighting between The Thing and the Torch. The Thing so resents the Torch (after all, the Torch could still maintain his human appearance despite his tremendous power) that his bitterness drives the Torch to quit the group in issue 3. But he's back in issue 4, which also features Marvel's first Golden Age revival (if you don't count the re-imagined Human Torch), the Sub-Mariner. **The Fantastic Four** features many Marvel milestones. In issue 9, the team goes broke. Whoever heard of superheroes with money problems? Issue 13 introduces evil counterparts of the FF, not all of whom are human. Marvel's single most popular villain, Dr. Doom, debuts in issue 5. No other villain in fantasy and science fiction short of Darth Vader (who resembles Dr. Doom in a number of ways) has cast a longer shadow.

12¢
The Fantastic Four
THE GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD!
ALSO, LEARN THE SECRET OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S SKYSCRAPER HIDE-OUT!

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1962—Only Ant-Man is less than a rousing success. In **Amazing Fantasy 15**, as a throwaway idea, Stan Lee features Spider-Man in what he knows to be the final issue of that title. Sales reports dictate that the idea be carried further.

Tales to Astonish 27 features "The Man in the Ant Hill", a story about a scientist who discovers a shrinking serum. In issue 35, this story serves as the source for the birth of an odd new superhero—The Ant-Man.

The Incredible Hulk is featured in six issues of his own title, but is perhaps a bit too outre for audiences of the day. In **Tales to Astonish 101** (March 1968), the Hulk was once again given his own magazine, this time after 3½ years of sharing the title with Ant/Giant Man and the Sub-Mariner.

Tales of Suspense 39 introduces Iron Man, whose power derives from the transistorized armor he wears.

Journey Into Mystery 83 (Aug. '62) introduces Thor, God of Thunder. The first appearances of Iron Man (by Don Heck) and Spider-Man (by Steve Ditko) are the only premiere issues of these seminal characters not drawn by Jack Kirby (but Kirby did draw the covers for those introductory appearances).

1963—These first years of Marvel see the introduction of most of the major characters who dominate the line to this day. Marvel also secures a position in war (**Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos**) and western (**Kid Colt, Rawhide Kid, Two Gun Kid**) comics during this time. Only the new **X-Men**, introduced a decade ago, have managed to equal the impact of this opening salvo of the Marvel Age of Comics.

SILVER AGE

THE LATER SIXTIES

The Sixties also sees Nick Fury (still popular in his wartime incarnation of **Sgt. Fury**) go modern as **Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.**, Marvel's answer to James Bond and the Man from U.N.C.L.E. This strip heralds the work of a new star in the Marvel firmament as Jim Steranko demonstrates a talent that is part Jack Kirby and part pure energy. After crafting the strip in **Strange Tales** and the first six issues of Nick Fury's own short-lived title (along with three Captain America stories), Steranko leaves comics in 1969 for the fields of commercial illustration and magazine publishing.

Neal Adams makes a brief but memorable splash at Marvel, primarily in **X-Men 56-63** (missing only one issue). That the title is cancelled shortly afterward elicits no surprise. In those days, being popular with the fans wasn't always commercial.

The Fantastic Four continues being a place where new characters are born. Issue 48 sees the coming of the Silver Surfer and Galactus. Immediately before, the Inhumans are introduced, and just afterward comes the Black Panther.

In 1970, the seemingly impossible happens. Jack Kirby quits Marvel following over 100 issues of **The Fantastic Four**. New artists always attempt to imitate Kirby's style. If Marvel has a house style at this time, Kirby is it. But now he's gone from the bullpen.

The Fantastic Four does remain the flagship book of the line, influencing the other titles (**What If?** issue one [1976] features the FF in a parallel reality story, as do issues 6, 11 and 36. The FF makes a cameo in issue 22 which showcases, who else, Dr. Doom).

THE SEVENTIES

In the late Sixties, Roy Thomas convinced Marvel that adapting an old pulp character named Conan is a good idea. It takes a few issues for it to catch on, but Conan and his initial artist Barry Smith capture fandom's attention. Sales improve even further when John Buscema takes over drawing with a more commercial, less "arty" approach.

The Seventies also sees the entry of another Roy Thomas adaptation, **Star Wars**, and the beginnings of the mutant phenomenon, **The New X-Men**. Comics based on toys also start appearing. Near the end of the decade, a newcomer named Frank Miller begins drawing **Daredevil** with issue 158, then scripting as well ten issues later. He leaves after number 191. Those issues have more impact on comics than anything done in the previous ten years—and no other writer has figured out how to imitate Miller's genuinely philosophical approach to writing. Miller's return to writing **Daredevil** with issue 227 is creating yet another milestone.

THE EIGHTIES

Issue 232 of **The Fantastic Four** features the first Marvel milestone of the Eighties—John Byrne's "back to basics" approach to the book which started it all. Stories are streamlined down to the direct approach employed in the early Lee & Kirby

years of the title. Controversial at first, five years later Byrne's approach is widely accepted as being an idea whose time has come.

The Eighties also witness the **Marvel Superheroes Secret Wars** and its recent followup, **Secret Wars II**, which involve most of Marvel's other titles and characters in one grand storyline. Despite many claims to changes wrought by **Secret Wars**, the only lasting effects seem to be an alternate costume for Spider-Man (introduced in issue 252), the Thing visiting an alien world for a long stretch and ending his longterm courtship of the blind sculptress Alicia (after which he quit the FF) and the breakup of a romance in the X-Men.

Listing Marvel milestones is easy. What's hard is knowing where to stop. In 25 years, there have been an awful lot. John Byrne and Chris Claremont made the new **X-Men** Marvel's most popular book during the run of issues 108-143. With the exception of some dips after Byrne left, the title has remained strong, so much so that more mutants, including **The New Mutants**, **X-Factor** and the limited series **Firestar**, have been spawned.

1986 will see several calculated landmarks, including the introduction of a new line of books unrelated to the current Marvel universe. Whether or not "planned" milestones will work remains to be seen. While Marvel Comics may not be as down-to-earth gritty as they were 25 years ago, they perhaps reflect a more optimistic time now than they did then.

CF

SPECIAL SECTION

INTERVIEWS WITH

STAN LEE

JIM SHOOTER

JACK KIRBY

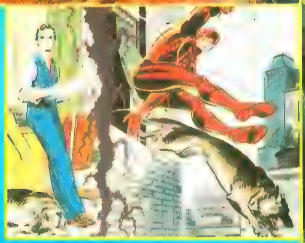
ROY THOMAS

25th

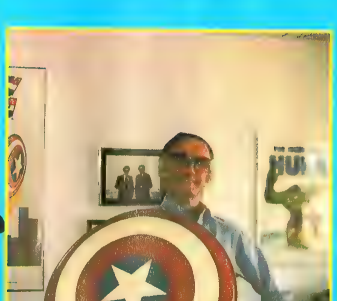
ANNIVERSARY OF MARVEL COMICS

A TALK WITH THE MAN

Stan!



25 Lee



I JUST FINISHED A MEETING WITH THE DIRECTOR OF SPIDER-MAN. HE IS VERY EXCITED ABOUT IT AND IS ANXIOUS TO START SHOOTING.

"It's hard for me to believe it's the 25th anniversary," says Lee. "It's incredible when I think about it. We started the **Fantastic Four** before most of our current readers were born! You have to be twenty-five years old to be as old as the **Fantastic Four**. That's amazing! To me it's like yesterday."

When Stan Lee decided in 1961 that it was time for a change in comics, he'd been involved with enough of them to know what had and had not been done before. Stan Lee began working at Timely Comics around 1941 when Joe Simon and Jack Kirby had just created Captain America. When Kirby and others moved on, Stan was asked to fill in as editor until Timely found a permanent replacement. Twenty years later Stan was still "filling in." He'd been through the rise and fall of the Golden Age of comics as well as the proliferation of horror comics in the Fifties when Atlas published more titles than anyone. Horror had become mystery in the dog days of the late Fifties and the superhero looked like he was on the verge of making a comeback again when Lee was suddenly struck when *deja vu*. He decided that he'd already done all this and didn't want to do it the same way all over again. Enter the Fantastic Four, Hulk, Ant-Man, Thor, Spider-Man, Iron Man, The Avengers, The X-Men and suddenly Lee was finding that not only were comics fun for him again, but he no longer felt sheepish about being a grown man making a living in comic books. He'd done things his own way and received praise and approbation in return.

"It wasn't always this way," Lee admits. "In the first fifteen years or so that I was the head writer and editor at Timely and Atlas, my wife and I would go to cocktail parties and somebody would say, 'What do you do?' I'd say I'm a writer. 'Really? What do you write?' And I'd start getting nervous and say, uh, magazine stories. 'Really? what magazine?' And I knew there was no way of avoiding it and end up saying comic books. Suddenly the person's expression would change. . . 'Oh, isn't that nice. . .' and walk away, looking for some celebrity.

"That's all changed now. I go places and I'm held up as one of the more interesting celebrities. People go over to playwrights and say, 'Hey, I want you to meet Stan Lee—he made up Spider-Man!' I'm very happy that this has happened. It's like achieving one of my goals because I remember an editorial I wrote years ago. I said that one of our main objectives would be bringing some additional measure of respect to comics. I said that I would consider myself and our company successful if we found a way, before we were through with this vale of tears, to elevate comics in the minds of the public. So that if somebody said, 'I write comics' or 'I draw comics,' people would say, 'Hey, really? Tell us about it,' and not say, 'A grown man like you?' So from that point of view, I'm very happy now."

In the summer of 1980, Marvel Entertainment group president James E. Galton and Marvel Comics Publisher Stan Lee traveled west from their New York corporate headquarters to establish an animation studio in Los Angeles. In conjunction with the Emmy and Oscar-winning animator David H. DePatie and his longtime production associate Lee Gunther, Galton and Lee formed Marvel Productions, Ltd. Lee remained in Los Angeles in the post of Creative Director for the new cartoon company.

MARVEL GOES TO THE MOVIES

The January 1985 issue of **COMICS FEATURE** presented an in-depth visit to Marvel Productions and an overview of projects in the works. In his capacity of Creative Director, Stan Lee oversees these projects in development as well as being called upon to consult in the non-animation use of the Marvel Comics characters.

One of the proposals at the time was for a Daredevil cartoon show, but Marvel has held back on following through with this for a number of interesting reasons.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35

HE KEEPS THE EPICS COMING

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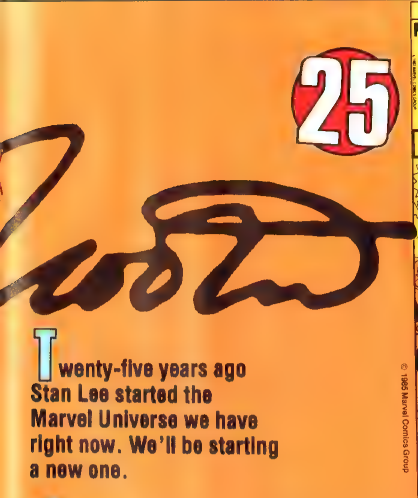

Twenty-five years ago Stan Lee started the Marvel Universe we have right now. We'll be starting a new one.

It began with the release of one book dated November 1961. Its cover featured a monster (not unlike those seen in such titles as **Strange Tales** and **Journey into Mystery**) in the heart of a city. But facing off against it were four very unusual human beings—the Fantastic Four. This quiet event heralded the birth of a new direction in comics, the day when Atlas Comics became **Marvel Comics!** But this is not to say that the then-unknown company took comicdom by storm. It was six months before their second superhero title, **The Incredible Hulk**, was launched. And that one was cancelled after only six issues! But 1962 also saw **Fantastic Four #4** featuring the rebirth of the original Sub-Mariner. Marvel established a tradition of reviving Golden Age characters continued most grandly in early 1964 when they brought back Captain America. The same year that saw the birth of the Hulk and the return of Prince Namor, also witnessed the creation of Ant-Man and Thor. Indeed, by 1963, Marvel was truly beginning to make waves in the comic book industry.

Since their founding year, 1961, only saw the birth of one new title, **The Fantastic Four**, Marvel's 25th anniversary celebrations will highlight that in particular.

"The first and biggest plan for Marvel's 25th anniversary is a two-part plan," says Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter. "Obviously we're going to be doing a lot of celebrating over the 25th anniversary issue of **Fantastic Four**. It'll be a 64-page issue and every comic book published that month will have a silver background on the cover.

"The second thing is that we'll be introducing an entire new Marvel Universe. Twenty-five years ago Stan Lee started the Marvel universe we have right now. We'll be starting a new one. That's all I can say about that right now," Shooter states cryptically. "Besides that we'll be doing everything that you expect us to do, including some special projects. We've already started; Marvel Saga is the first of our 25th anniversary projects. We'll be publishing special issues and things of that nature."

THE FF'S ANNIVERSARY

Although a triple-sized issue by John Byrne was originally announced by Marvel for **Fantastic Four** 296, in light of Byrne's sudden departure from Marvel, those plans have altered dramatically.

Instead of a triple-issue, the 25th anniversary issue will be a double-issue, running 64 pages. Five artists will illustrate the five chapters of the story, including Jerry Ordway (the new regular FF artist), Ron Frenz and John Romita Jr. The issue will be plotted by Jim Shooter and scripted by Stan Lee and will deal with the search for The Thing.

X-MEN: THE SECOND EDITION

What could possibly make as big an impression on Marvel's readership as all of the exciting plans for **The Fantastic Four**? How about an X-Men reprint series which is much more than just a reprint series? In fact, the series is different from any comic reprints ever done by anyone before.

"The most interesting reprint series that's coming up this year is not really quite a reprint series," Shooter states. "We're going to be reprinting the **X-Men** starting with Issue 94. But unlike other reprints, it's really going to be a *second edition*. We're going to re-edit the stories and expand them a little bit here and there—clear them up, clean them up and maybe recolor. Included with the original stories we intended to run new stories—stories which Issue by issue relate to what was going on in the main story being reprinted."

The first reprint issue will include the first ten pages from **Giant Size X-Men** number one, just reprinted a couple years ago, leading into a brand new story explaining how the original X-Men chose to disband while the new X-Men decided to stay on. This will be written by Chris Claremont and drawn by Dave Cockrum—the original artist of the new X-men.

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A TALK WITH THE KING

JACK

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25

KIRBY

That was the whole point of comics for me. I created my own concepts and I enjoyed doing that.

WITHOUT Jack Kirby, there may well not be a Marvel Comics today. Kirby helped create all of Marvel's seminal characters—The Fantastic Four, The Hulk, Spider-Man, Thor, The X-Men, Captain America and others. These heroes form the backbone of the Marvel line, then and now. In this, the 25th anniversary year of the creation of the Fantastic Four, it is impossible to look back over Marvel's creative history without giving credit to Kirby, their most powerful creative dynamo.

Kirby lived on Long Island for 20 years, and it is a time he remembers with fondness.

"I lived in Long Island, in East Williston in central Long Island. It was a nice town in which to raise children. I bought a house there. It was a lovely little town—you could walk across it in 5 minutes. I raised all of my children there."

Unlike other Marvel staffers who worked at the office, Jack labored at home.

"I had a little dungeon-like basement and I worked there," he recalls. "I bought a big moose head for about five bucks and put it up on the wall. If you patted that moose head, a big dust cloud would come out. It was a wonderful place to work because I could create the stories and the characters there. When you're alone and you can think, that's all an artist/writer wants, and then you can reach out for new things. It's not just a matter of telling stories and selling books, it's a matter of not being static. I never remained static. I always looked for new things and new characters and new ways of telling a story."

A CREATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Describing the 1960 period at Marvel, Kirby explains that the monster books they were doing had become repetitious and a new direction was needed.

"Marvel had monster books, romance books and westerns—and all of those weren't working any more. They didn't know what to do with them. Nobody there could write them so that they didn't remain static. Marvel was stagnant.

"I did a **Rawhide Kid** which sold better than all the rest. I did monster books which are still remembered and collected today. When I drew a monster book I'm giving you the real thing and you'll enjoy it. That's what I did for Marvel. But I felt that wouldn't sustain Marvel because it was the same old subject which had been used for quite a few years. Going back to the superheroes was the thing to do."

Kirby states that there were no story conferences to discuss the new characters before he prepared them.

"I came in with presentations. I'm not gonna' wait around for conferences. I said, 'This is what you have to do.' I came in with Spider-Man, the Hulk and the Fantastic Four. I didn't fool around. I said you've got to do superheroes. I took Spider-Man from the Silver Spider—a script by Jack Oleck that we hadn't used in **Mainline**. That's what gave me the idea for Spider-Man. I've still got that script.

"The Hulk I took from one of the monster stories I'd done." (*Note: from* **Journey into Mystery** *#6*) "I took the Hulk name and made a superhero out of him because I felt it was realistic," he explains. "There's a Hulk in all of us. It was a natural. They were going to discontinue it after the third issue because they had no faith in it. The **Hulk** was saved when a couple of guys came up from Columbia University with a list of 200 names saying that the Hulk was the Mascot of their dormitory. I said, 'For God's sake, don't stop the **Hulk** now! We've got the college crowd!' We'd never had the college crowd. They would never read a comic book before, but this time they were reading them because I was slanting them to a universal audience. My job is to do a comic book which attracts everybody. If I did a motion picture, I would have the same kind of challenge. My job was entertainment and that's what I did!"

Kirby feels that his approach is that he writes from the heart.

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LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

C'mon, think quick. What single individual, still actively writing and editing comic books, is most responsible for making Golden Age heroes popular again? Who brought virtually the entire stable of Timely characters back to Marvel in **The Avengers**, **The Invaders** and **The Liberty Legion**? Who then went over to DC to pen the adventures of the Captain Marvel Family, give the old Justice Society of America and Seven Soldiers of Victory new leases on life and even create a second generation superteam based on the children of the Golden Age DC heroes? Roy Thomas, of course. And that's why we're doing something unique in this issue of **COMICS FEATURE**. We don't normally conduct an interview with a writer just because he's about to take over one of our columns, but this time we'll make an exception.

I became interested in comics quite a few years after Roy did. While I purchased many of the comic books of the earliest days of Marvel and the new heyday of DC that appeared in the early '60s, my active period in fandom really didn't begin until the mid to late '60s. At that time, every fan saw Roy as the heir apparent to Stan the Man. Roy the Wonder Boy was the first to inherit many of the titles that Stan was abandoning as writer, such as **The FF** and **The Avengers**. Then when Stan moved on to bigger and better things, it was Roy who became the only other person to edit a Marvel. Too soon after bringing Robert E. Howard's Conan and George Lucas' **Star Wars** to the House of Ideas, and along the way turning over the title of Editor-in-Chief to other hands, Roy left what had been his home for almost a decade and went to work for DC. At the time, everyone was shocked. It couldn't really happen, could it? Why, it was almost like Stan Lee jumping ship and swimming over to the competition. Even Jack Kirby's departure wasn't as surprising, at least for those of us who knew that he had always jumped around the industry, penning masterworks for all sorts of companies in the '40s and '50s.

Beginning next issue, Roy Thomas will pick up the reins of our *Golden Age of Comics* column as Ron Goulart officially assumes duty on *Strip Search* while Max Allan Collins devotes his time to writing novels. We will all miss Max (although he will pop up in these pages from time to time), but we think you'll be very happy with Ron's work (we've already received letters from people saying how much they enjoy the strip columns he's already done). We also think you'll get a bit of a kick out of Roy expounding on the subject he loves best: *The Golden Age of Comics!*

—Happy Hal

While I didn't quite come in on the ground floor, I'd say I came in on the second floor of Marvel Comics.

ROY THOMAS

Roy Thomas has been writing comic books for twenty years. For twenty years before that he was a fan. It all began with what has come to be called "The Golden Age of Comics."

"I first started reading comics around the end of that period," Thomas recalls. "I was four years old back in 1945 when, according to my mother, I spoiled these shiny covers in a local drug store and said, 'What that?' I want it.' It was probably **Superman** or **Batman**. She read them to me and by the time I was five or so I was reading them myself. You could say that I never stopped reading Golden Age comics since I started in 1945."

Thomas started writing *about* comics for a burgeoning comics fandom back in the late Fifties when he launched the first all superhero fanzine, **Alter Ego**. "Before that I had seen the fanzine **Xero** which had Jerry Bail's All-In-Color-For-A-Dime series. In the first issue of **Alter-Ego** I did a parody of the JSA (Justice Society of America) and wrote about what a possible revival and revamping of The Spectre could be like."

Thomas first published comic stories were for Charlton and he soon had the opportunity to work at DC—but left after one week in an atmosphere which he did not find personally conductive to creativity. He went to work at Marvel, where he remained for fifteen years.

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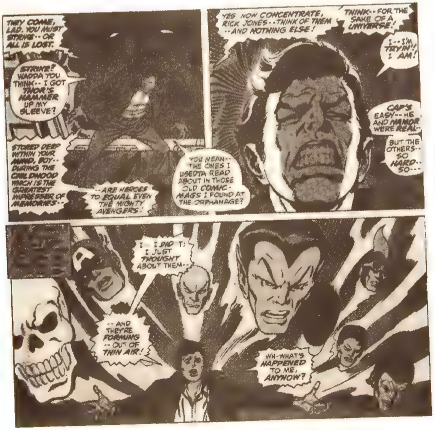
"The real formative work was done at Marvel in the first three or four years, right before I got there," Thomas states. "I came in at the beginning of what I consider the height of the '65 period when Jack Kirby was introducing the Inhumans, the Black Panther and others. This was also the last few months of Steve Ditko's **Spider-Man** and then the John Romita period that sold even better and started to establish the title as Marvel's best-selling title. All of that was in the first year or so after I came to work there. While I didn't come in on the ground floor, I'd say I came in on the second floor of Marvel Comics."

This was in the days when Stan Lee was still the editor-in-chief, writing or carefully guiding each and every Marvel title.

"When I came in, Stan was writing virtually all of the main books. I began writing a couple of the books that Stan wanted to give up. Then I brought in other writers such as Gary Friedrich. But over the years, as Stan withdrew more and more from the writing and the company got bigger and more successful (by the early Seventies they had passed DC in sales), we naturally began to have the usual problems you have when you become large. There was a thinning out of the product in some ways," Thomas observes, "but at the same time we were able to expand into other fields that Stan never would have done. We did science fiction and we did the **Conan** book which Stan was interested in doing, but he would never have written it just that way! Jack Kirby never would have drawn the book in that way. We were able to bring in another approach to things."

WHEN I CAME IN, STAN WAS WRITING VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE MAIN BOOKS.

In 1980 when Thomas felt Marvel had backed off from an agreement, he chose to leave the company. "While I don't now think that it's particularly important to be both the editor and the writer, I did at the time. Plus there were certain things I'd always wanted to do that you could only do at DC, so I decided that it was time for a change. If Stan had still been in charge of the company, I probably would not have left. Stan and I, despite many fights over the years, had a very good relationship."


THEY COME! LAD, YOU MUST STRIKE -- OR ALL IS LOST!
STRIKE! WADDA YOU THINK-- I GOT THOR'S HAMMER UP MY SLEEVE?
STRIKE! DEEP WITHIN YOUR MIND, BOY-- DARING THE CHILDHOOD MAGIC IS THE QUICKEST-- MOST POWERFUL OF WEAPONRY!
-- ARE HEROES TO SCHOOLBOYS, THE WORLD OVER!
YES. NOW CONCENTRATE, RICK JONES-- THINK OF THEM -- AND NOTHING ELSE!
THINK-- FOR THE SAKE OF A UNIVERSE!
I-- I'M TRYIN'! I AM!
YOU WERE-- THE ONES I USED TO READ ABOUT IN THOSE OLD COMIC MAGS I FOUND AT THE ORPHANAGE!
CAP'S EASY-- HE'S A HANDFUL AND HANDS WERE READY!
BUT THE OTHERS-- SO HARD-- SO--
I-- I DID TRY-- I JUST THOUGHT ABOUT THEM--
-- AND THEY'RE FORMING -- OUT OF THIN AIR!
HA-- WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MR. ANYMORE?

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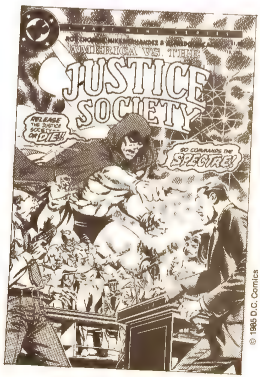

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ORIGINALLY, MY UNDERSTANDING WAS THAT NO MATTER WHAT THEY DID IN THE CRISIS IN THE FUTURE, THAT SUPERMAN, BATMAN AND WONDER WOMAN WOULD STILL EXIST IN THE PAST.

THE GOLDEN AGE REVISITED

At DC he was able to pen many of his Golden Age favorites, including Captain Marvel and the Justice Society of America. But being able to write about his favorite heroes didn't mean that he was able to accomplish all that he wanted to do.

RLY THOMAS PAUL KUPPERBERG & ARVELL JONES
ALL STAR SQUADRON
THE CRISIS IS HERE!
THOMAS, McFARLANE & MARCOS
INFINITY INC.
THE NEW JUSTICE LEAGUE!

A PAIR OF MODERN "GOLDEN AGE" STORIES

THE CRISIS HAS CAUSED ANOTHER CRISIS!

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"I only had a couple of brief periods of being able to really put things together," Thomas reveals. "Due to a combination of reasons including myself as well as everything else, it didn't work out the way I thought it would. Even George Lucas said that **Star Wars** was only twenty-five percent of what he thought it would be."

Now, with the changes wrought by the "Crisis on Infinite Earths" series, the Golden Age world of Earth Two never existed, nor did many of Thomas' characters.

"There were a number of things, such as Superman never having existed, that undercut so much of what I had been working on for the past two or three years. I had to straighten that out in a few months. That's why I've put off doing **All Star Squadron**. While I think that the **Crisis On Infinite Earths** is a wonderful piece of work, for myself it ended up being a disaster and I wish I'd never heard of it. Certain aspects of it were, I think, necessary to DC. In fact, Marv Wolfman has said that he probably wouldn't have been able to do it had it not been for a letter which I sent them at a time when they were shying away from this sort of thing. In my letter I said that this is something they should really go off and do and that they would have my cooperation. But then they went and made decisions which undercut the reasons for my cooperation.

"Originally, my understanding was that no matter what they did in the **Crisis** in the future, that Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman would still exist in the past."

But then Thomas received a memo advising him that those three characters would no longer be able to appear in new stories following the **Crisis**. He felt that the circumstances had caused everything he enthusiastically supported to be turned against him, taking away his three major characters appearing in **All Star Squadron**.

"So I said that I wouldn't continue **All Star** unless we could revamp it, which is what we're in the process of doing now. They thought that they were doing what was best for the company. And, in my own way, so was I. I said, 'Okay, the damage has been done. Let's try to get an **All Star** or **Infinity** off on some new basis.'

"Whether there had been a new number one or not, there was already a lot I had been intending to do with the individual lives of the characters. When you have a book with such a large cast, it's very hard to get into their personalities and their private lives. Plus, setting it in World War Two makes it another time removed. In the case of these superheroes one knows the future and that they're not going to die and so forth. I wanted to find ways around that and see if there were lives I could actually affect in these stories. I suggested that we continue **All Star Squadron** as a mini-series rather than as a monthly series such as DC would prefer. I'd rather just try something out. Then if it didn't work in that mini-series, try something different in another."

What is in the works is a Justice Society special as well as the new **Secret Origins** series featuring a Golden Age character every other issue (including the original Batman in an upcoming issue!).

"**All Star Squadron** will," Thomas hopes, "return in one form or another." Being the long-time Golden Age fan that he is, those characters are not ones that Thomas is ever likely to abandon.

Stan Lee

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

"What happened with **Daredevil**," Lee explains, "is that we're now developing that as a live-action project—either movie or as a prime-time series, so we've held off with the animation for awhile.

"What happens in this business is that things change. You have certain things you plan to do and as time goes by some of them fall by the wayside. Others that you didn't even think about come along and they get big. We've been very busy with our **Transformers**, **Muppet Monsters**, **Dungeons and Dragons**, **GI Joe** and all the commercials we're doing and a lot of other shows that we're starting to develop.

"To give you an example of how things change in this business," Lee continues, "for a number of years somebody had bought the rights to the Silver Surfer and planned to do a movie. He had one concept after another that he developed and each one just didn't work. I kept telling him that they weren't right. But it took about 2½ years of trying until he finally gave up, and that was the end of the Silver Surfer movie. However, we are now making a deal with another producer to do a Fantastic Four movie. I think this one will actually see the screen because this producer has the money, the knowledge and the experience to do it. He loves the FF and has wanted to do it for years. As part of the FF movie we included the Silver Surfer character who will remain a major factor in the story. So that means that although the Silver Surfer project failed, I believe he'll be coming to the screen in a much larger movie as part of the **Fantastic Four**. So you never know in this business how things will turn out."

Other Marvel movie projects are even further along, such as Cannon Film's production of **Spider-Man**, slated for a Christmas 1986 release.

"I just finished a meeting with the director of **Spider-Man**. He's very excited about it and anxious to start shooting. We have a script and he and I were talking about the various changes it might need. He's reading the script over for the fifth time and he's going to call me and then we'll see precisely how we want it refined. I would think that in another month or so we should be ready on that and we can start going."

Also coming from Cannon Films is a live-action version of Captain America (not to be confused with the Broadway play adaptation of the character presently in the works).

"Captain America is being done by a fellow named Michael Winner, who directed the first two **Death Wish** movies. He's in England now and he just submitted a script which he worked on with an English writer. So both **Spider-Man** and **Captain America** are in the works."

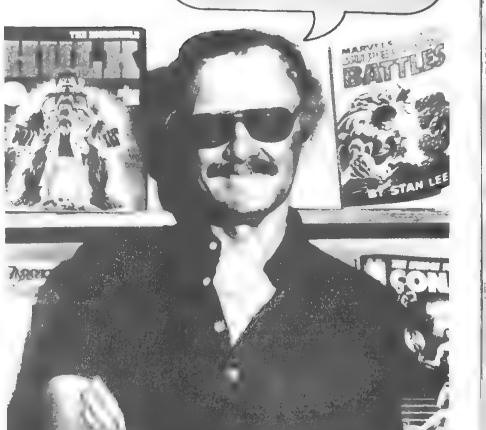
Which brings us to one of the strangest Marvel properties currently in production, the one being brought to the screen by Lucasfilm, Howard the Duck.

"I don't really know much about that," states Lee, tongue firmly planted in cheek. "George Lucas seems to have the strange feeling that he can do a movie without any help from me! But it's coming along very well. The script was written and they've started filming. I think Universal considers that to be one of their big movies for next year."

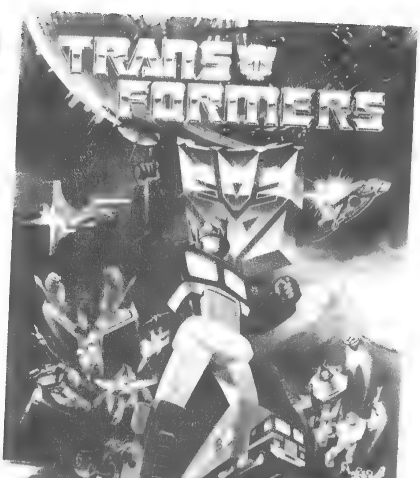
Which brings us to the question of just how much input Stan Lee or Marvel Comics has in these and still other productions currently winding their way towards the silver screen?

"The creative judgment is pretty much in my hands," says Lee. "That's why I'm here. The degree of control depends on each project. On **Howard the Duck** I think I have the title of creative consultant, but I've rarely been involved with that. With the **Dr. Strange** movie which is being done by Kings Road Productions, it's being written by Bob Gale, who was the co-writer of **Back to the Future**. I have a tremendous amount of input there. Bob and I are friends and we talk about everything together. We're also quite friendly with Steve Friedman, the producer, and I'm very actively involved with that film. I'm also actively involved in **Spider-Man** and expect to be in the **Captain America** story. I know that I'll be actively involved in the **Fantastic Four** because the producer and I have become good friends.

"In a few of the other things that are now in the planning stage, it really depends on who the producer is and who the director is. Some people just don't want to be told anything. They want to do it on their own," Lee points out. "If I feel they're doing it


THE CREATIVE JUDGMENT IS PRETTY MUCH IN MY HANDS, THAT'S WHY I'M HERE. THE DEGREE OF CONTROL DEPENDS ON EACH PROJECT.
HULK
MARVEL SUPER HEROES
BATTLES
BY STAN LEE

... THE ONLY EXPERIENCE I'VE HAD WITH LIVE ACTION TELEVISION, DR. STRANGE AND THE HULK WERE FINE. CAPTAIN AMERICA WAS A BIG DISAPPOINTMENT AND SPIDER-MAN WAS A TOTAL NIGHTMARE.



wrong I can still butt in. As in the case of George Lucas, if I feel someone's doing it right, I'm not looking to butt in just for the sake of butting in. George Lucas is a guy whom I'm quite willing to let do things his own way."

MARVEL AND TELEVISION

Before there was a Marvel Productions, some of the characters were made into tv series and movies of the week, not always with marvel-ous results. This was because Marvel retained very little creative control.

"I wish we did," Lee sighs. "Those shows—we had **Captain America, Dr. Strange, The Hulk** and **Spider-Man**. I probably had a little more input into the Hulk than any of the others because I was somewhat friendly with the producer, Kenneth Johnson. I realized that he knew a lot more about television production than I do. Even though he changed the Hulk a bit, I think that all the changes were for the better; I approved all of them. He made it palatable for an audience consisting of many people who never read the Hulk. Ken made it less comic-booky and more adult. The proof is in the pudding. That show was very successful for three years.

"In the case of **Spider-Man**, I had a lot of input but learned how frustrating it is to be a consultant," Lee reveals, "because the input means they let you talk and yell and scream and make suggestions all you want to—but they don't have to pay any attention, and they didn't. I kept telling them everything they did with that show was wrong. The only good thing, I felt, were some of the stunts they did—some of the shots of him crawling up the walls. But the stories, the directing, the characterization—everything else about it, of course, was terrible. There was nothing I could do. I had a meeting with CBS, I wrote letters, made phone calls. . . they listened very politely but refused to change anything. So that was very unfortunate.

"With **Captain America** it was pretty much the same thing," Lee relates. "They just didn't get the right feeling in that. It's not that these people aren't sincere, they try on all of them, it's just done by committee and to some of them it's just a job."

Just as with the **Hulk**, Lee had few problems with the tv movie adaptation done of Dr. Strange.

"I probably had the most input into that one. I've become good friends with the writer/producer, Phil DeGuere. I was pleased with **Dr. Strange** and **The Hulk**. I think that **Dr. Strange** would have done much better than it did in the ratings except that it aired opposite **Roots**. Those are the only experiences I've had with live-action television. **Dr. Strange** and the **Hulk** were fine. **Captain America** was a big disappointment and **Spider-Man** was a total nightmare."

SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

Now available on videocassette are many of the cartoons featuring Marvel characters dating back to their first forays into animation in the mid-Sixties.

"A videocassette producer named Prism signed a contract with Marvel to do all of our shows that have been on television," Lee reveals. "These are mainly the old ones and whatever new ones are available. This dates back to the very first limited animation ones. It's unfortunate that the best ones that were ever done as far as being true to the comic books are the ones that were done with the worst animation. And yet I sometimes watch them and the

"EVENTUALLY THEY'LL GET OUT OF THE GRAPHIC MAGAZINE FORMAT. THEY'LL START BEING BOOKS. THAT IS . . . THE FUTURE AS I SEE IT."

THE TRANSFORMERS AND GI JOE ARE GOOD EXAMPLES OF PROPERTIES THAT MARVEL IS TURNING INTO BOTH CARTOONS AND COMIC BOOKS.

animation doesn't even bother me."

Stan Lee also has a new book coming out.

"Ballantine is publishing **The Best of Spider-Man**, which is a collection of the newspaper strips with about forty or fifty pages of comments by me.

"I'm supposed to do a Silver Surfer graphic novel," Lee continues. "I've been waiting for Keith Pollard to finish the art-work. When he does, I'll write it. I don't have any other plans. If there's anything special they want me to write at Marvel, they'll let me know. I love doing it and never turn it down. The only continuing writing I do is the newspaper strip. I write every word. It's really difficult, day after day after day. I usually do it on the weekend."

And then there's the case of a main-stream novel which was recently published bearing the credit "Stan Lee' on it. Is there another Stan Lee? The Marvel Comics Stan Lee really comes alive over this point.

"I don't know if I should sue or what! I think that guy has a middle initial he could have used. The terrible thing is, so many people think its me," Stan admits. "I get these phone calls and they sound so disappointed when I tell them that it isn't me. When they congratulate me I'm always tempted to say 'Thanks a lot!' and just hang up. I keep hoping that it'll go away—that maybe it won't sell well and people will forget about it. Now I hear that they're gonna make a movie of it! He'll probably become the biggest writer in America and suddenly I'll be the other Stan Lee! I hate this guy!" Lee says half-seriously.

THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE

"As far as the 25th anniversary goes, I was talking to Jim Galton recently and he asked if I'd be free to do some touring and going to conventions. I told him I'd avoided that in the past because I don't think it's right. I'm not with the comics any more and I'd feel like a phony going to comic conventions and cashing in on whatever little fame I had. But for the 25th anniversary, which is a big thing, I told him I'd be happy to do it. One thing which has nothing to do with the anniversary is that I'm going to Australia for their first big comic book convention. Apparently they asked the fans to take a vote of who they wanted as a guest and I was the guy they voted for, along with Will Eisner and Jim Steranko."

Comics have gone through many changes in the past twenty-five years and Stan hopes to see even more and greater changes ahead for them.

"I used to say, years ago, that the thing that would make me the happiest is if comic books would get some real recognition and be treated like part of the cultural life of the nation the way novels, opera, ballet or movies are. I think it's coming, it's happening. I certainly think Marvel has been in the forefront of this by continually putting out more expensive books and by originating the concept of the graphic novel and so on. I think that we're still feeling our way. There have been a lot of mistakes made. Things aren't as perfect as they should be, but we're trying. We put out books now which cost seven bucks, such as **Greenberg the Vampire**, and have really unusual themes. **Greenberg** is not your typical comic book story. I think that it's brilliantly written and one of the most original things I've read.

"Eventually I think we'll even get out of the graphic magazine format and they'll start looking more and more like books. They'll start *being* books. That is the wave of the future as I see it." **CF**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

"The second edition will be an embellishment," Shooter explains, "and as much as possible we're going to be trying to use the original artists who worked on those stories to do the embellishments. I think that it will be something that everyone will want."

The covers on the special reprint series will switch off between John Bolton and Art Adams. While Bolton's exciting work will be new to the **X-Men**, Art Adams made a big splash last year on **X-Men Annual 9** and **New Mutants Special 1**.

"This will probably start appearing during the summer and it will be an ongoing monthly series, not a limited series," says Shooter. "There's been over a hundred issues of the new **X-Men**. We'll continue the second edition until the readers tell us they don't want it, and the way to do that is to stop buying it."

In explaining how Marvel arrives at the final decision to do a series of reprints, Shooter explains that the process is more obvious than we might think. "Usually our reprints have been done in response to— no kidding—popular demand."

1986 AND BEYOND

Many projects by many people are in the works, some to appear in 1986 and others during the year following.

April 1st will see the publication of the direct market one-shot special **Fred Hem-**

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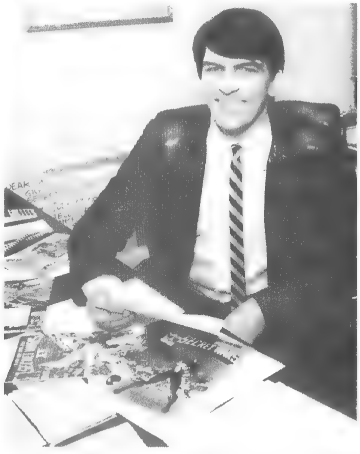


JIM GALTON, MYSELF AND A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE HAVE CHANGED THE ENTIRE WAY THE MARKETPLACE OPERATES AND MADE IT A BETTER PLACE FOR CREATIVE PEOPLE AND BETTER FOR THE COMPANY ITSELF.

back Destroys the Marvel Universe. Inspired by a rumor widespread in fandom a couple of years back, it's a satirical look at a Marvel Comics where Jim Shooter kills off all of their heroes. Releasing it on April Fools Day is more than just chance. Hembeck currently does a double-page strip in the centerspread of Marvel's house organ, **Marvel Age** each month. His parodies of superheroes have been popular in comics fandom for several years now.

Barry Smith, who came to Marvel in 1969 and achieved huge popularity on the first 22 issues of **Conan the Barbarian**, left the four-color world of comics in the mid-Seventies. He returned a couple of years ago and has been sporadically appearing in the pages of Marvel Comics. "Barry is actually working full time for us," Shooter reveals. "It may seem occasional because they only come out once in awhile, but that's because he's very slow and meticulous. Barry has five or six projects going at once with us. He isn't doing a Conan as far as I know. I don't know why—although he is doing a **Kull** graphic novel.

"It's really great seeing all those guys back who long ago left comics," Shooter adds. "It's great to see Berni Wrightson walking around the place and occasionally Barry Smith and Mike Kaluta."

Berni Wrightson recently completed a Spider—Man graphic novel and is now at work on one featuring the Hulk. Before Denny O'Neil left Marvel, he pitched the idea of doing a graphic novel featuring the Shadow (an old pulp hero most recently brought to comics in the Seventies by DC Comics). This project is still active and will be written by O'Neil, pencilled by Mike Kaluta and inked by Berni Wrightson. Kaluta was the original penciller of DC's Shadow series and Wrightson inked one of those issues as well. No publication date on The Shadow has been announced.

While Shooter plans to do more writing in the future now that **Secret Wars II** is behind him, he doesn't plan another scheduled series because he doesn't have the time. "In order to do that I'd have to give up every weekend and work a lot of evenings, which I really don't want to do. So I'll do more of the kinds of things that I can do when I have the time and when they're done, then they'll be scheduled."

Looking back over the past twenty-five year history of the company for which he now occupies the head position once held by Stan Lee, Shooter feels that Marvel has accomplished a variety of things in that time.

"I think that they've revolutionized the comic book industry several times. First there was Stan and the artists he worked with at the time. Their goal was to stop writing down to kids and start writing stories to find their own audience, especially an older audience. It worked so well that in recent years there had been no comics published which were accessible to kids. So in the last couple of years we launched Star Comics which revolutionized comics in another direction, bringing back comics that were accessible to kids."

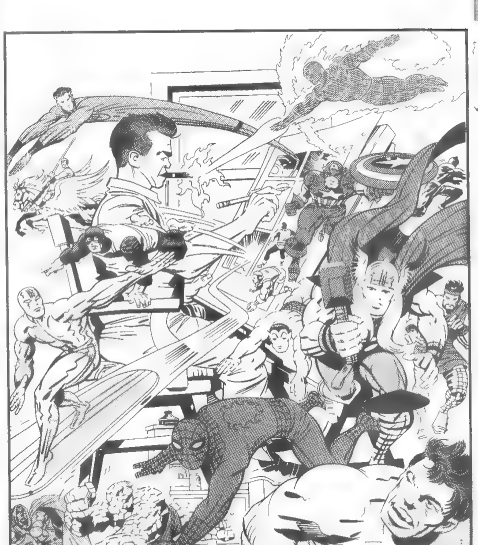
"Then there is the way comics function as a place in which creative people can earn a living," says Shooter. "Jim Galton, myself and a lot of other people have changed the entire way the marketplace operates and made it a better place for creative people and better for the company itself. Comic book creators are being extremely well paid and have great benefits and opportunities. And because of that, Marvel has succeeded incredibly well and grown stronger and stronger.

"We've opened the door with distribution reaching out into different markets that we hope will bring new readers who'd never read comics. Hopefully, they'll be exposed to **Transformers** as well as **Iron Man**, **Daredevil** and maybe things like **American Flagg.**" (The last is one of the non-Marvel titles available for readers to discover in today's comic book marketplace.) When it comes to changes in marketing, distribution and related areas Shooter states, "We really feel that Marvel is on the cutting edge of this."

That's all very exciting, but what's all this about a *new* Marvel universe beginning this year? I guess we'll just have to wait and see... **CF**

JACK KIRBY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35



KIRBY AND FRIENDS— THE KING AT WORK

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"I write from a people's point of view. I write what I know about the next guy and what I know about myself. That puts a little realism in a story. Then I dramatize it for entertainment and have a wonderful time at it. I think that anybody who gets the opportunity and the time to do it has a wonderful time.

"It's not the heroics. It's the humanity that counts," Kirby asserts, "and that's what I put in my stories. Of course I don't get gory. I don't get heavy. I don't have to. It's something that you'll never find in my stories."

Kirby drew on past experiences whenever he wrote or drew for Marvel.

"I was a PFC in a heavy weapons platoon," says Kirby of his stint in the army in the Second World War. "There was plenty of action. When a barrage came in, you thought that the world was gonna' end. I saw things that made me turn off. Then, of course, the war became bearable. A lot of these things are reflected in my stories. I can dramatize what I felt. I did that in those stories. People began to mean a lot to me; my characters began to mean a lot to me. The Hulk, Spider-Man, Capt. America and all the rest—and of course the Howling Commandoes. . . They were people and they were successful. Everything I did for Marvel was successful."

IT'S NOT THE HEROICS. IT'S THE HUMANITY THAT COUNTS, AND THAT'S WHAT I PUT IN MY STORIES.

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CLASSIC CHARACTERS —NEW AND OLD—

In the fourth issue of **The Fantastic Four**, when the Marvel universe was still aborning, Kirby revived a character he had never been creatively associated with before: Prince Namor of Atlantis—the Sub-Mariner.

"I felt that Sub-Mariner was a powerful character and should be used. It had originally been done by Bill Everett. But those old characters, like the Human Torch, could be used. I used everything that was at hand, that Marvel had which could be used as a superhero.

"I brought Captain America back from the dead and I made him human because Bucky was dead. He had to live with the fact that he no longer had Bucky. Those things happen. Having been in a war, I've seen that. The war changed me because I saw guys suffer—guys with wounds. I saw one guy walking through the train and he was saying, 'I understand my wife wants to talk to me? Where is she? Have you guys seen her?' Of course his wife wasn't there. He didn't have his mind. He was in shock. This was on a train heading for the hospital at Verdun. I saw all that. I saw guys with half-faces and I began to see people in every type of circumstance. And there were other sides, comic sides. I put all those facets into the war stories. My war stories for DC are still remembered."

Kirby's creations reflected the tone of the times in which they were written. That is why so many of them were, either directly or indirectly, products of the atomic age.

"I created the X-Men because of the radiation scare at that time," says Kirby. "What I did was give the beneficial side. I always feel that there's hope in the human condition. Sure, I could have made it real scary. We don't know the connotations of genetics and radiation. We can create radiation but we don't know what it's going to do. I think there's a possible path through these dangerous courses that will steer us to permanent peace and make new people of us. That's what I did with the X-Men. They were young people who enjoyed life and had a teacher.

"I took all of that from the times that we lived in. This was only about 15 years after Hiroshima. That's no time at all. This was the period when we were first thinking about getting electricity from nuclear plants. We didn't know what radiation could do because we saw all the effects it had had on the people of Hiroshima. How can we tell—radiation might help us as well as hurt us. We haven't explored all of it yet. That's how Ben Grimm came about."

One aspect of Ben Grimm—the Thing—is that the appearance of the character evolved during the early years of the title.

"I took the liberty of changing him," Kirby agrees. "At first he looked a little pimply and I felt that was kind of ugly. What I did was give him the skin of a dinosaur. I felt that would add to his power. Dinosaurs had thick plated hides and of course that's what the Thing had."

THE STAN LEE CONNECTION

For many years, Stan Lee has taken sole credit for the creation of Marvel's best-known characters. Lee underscored his claims in his book, **Origins of Marvel Comics.**

"That's his version of it," Kirby observes. "If he wants to say that, it's his book. If I write my book, you'll get my side of it. But I can tell you that my side of it is the real side—Stan Lee never created a character. In fact, if you look it up in Maurice Horn's book, he was amazed, too. He was amazed at the kind of things that came out of Marvel after I got there and the fact that Stan Lee had never created a character before that. What has he created since? Nothing. I don't think that Stan Lee cares about creating characters. That's my professional opinion. But as far as writing the stories is

BLAZING BATTLE ACTION WITH
SGT. FURY
AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS
KEEP MOVIN', YOU LUNKHEADS!! NOBODY LIVES FOREVER! SO GIT THE LEAD OUT AND FOLLOW ME! WE GOT US A WAR TO WIN!
LAST ISSUE SPECIAL! THE VERY FIRST APPEARANCE OF SGT FURY BY STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY
"SEVEN AGAINST THE NAZIS!"

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TWO EARLY MARVEL TEAMS

concerned, he never wrote the stories—not mine anyway.

"I was a penciller and a storyteller and I insisted on doing my own writing. I always wrote my own story, no matter what it was. Nobody ever wrote a story for me. I created my own characters. I always did that. That was the whole point of comics for me. I created my own concepts and I enjoyed doing that."

Lee rewrote Jack's captions and word balloons when he brought the artwork into the office.

"Lee wouldn't let me put the dialogue in. I wrote the story and made up the characters. I had to tell Stan Lee what the story was going to be. He didn't know. Nobody's ever seen Stan Lee write a story. I've never seen him write a story—not in front of me. Stan was an editor. I argued all the time about doing the word balloons, but I wasn't allowed to do them. Stan Lee was editor, and his cousin was the publisher and I wasn't going to argue with that."

In those days, the offices of Marvel Comics weren't large. Only a few people worked there.

"Johnny Romita was there and Steve Ditko. Steve Ditko did **Spider-Man** by himself. He built Spider-Man. He's the one that refined the character. He's a thorough professional and he's an intellect. He's a little withdrawn but he has a fine mind. Stan Lee didn't even have to bother with it. Steve developed Spider-Man—I just did

SATIRE TO ME IS JUST HAVING FUN. IT'S A LITTLE LIKE MISCHIEF AND THAT'S ALL IT IS. YOU'LL FIND THAT IT NEVER HURTS ANYBODY.
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SILVER SURFER— GALACTUS' POPULAR HERALD

one cover." (Note: **Amazing Fantasy 15**). "In Steve's hands, I felt that **Spider-Man** would be a great book, and it was. I have a high regard for Steve Ditko, and for John Romita, who is a fine artist.

"I'm alone in my studio every day. Nobody tells me what to write or what to draw. And that's the way it was at Marvel! I'd come in once or twice a month. I enjoyed coming to Marvel because on the way there I would meet people such as Jack Dempsey—prize fighters. I met Xavier Cugat, the orchestra leader one time. I'd come off the Long Island Railroad and take a cab. But the New York cab situation is so bad that I'd get out and walk. I'd meet Jack Dempsey coming out of his hotel and we'd have conversations. He was a wonderful guy. I'd go into restaurants and meet former prize fighters and people in show business. I have an affinity towards those people."

Jack Kirby did a send-up of the early Marvel days in **What If?**—"What if the Original Marvel Bullpen had become the Fantastic Four?"

"That was strictly my way of doing a satire. Stan Lee is always billing himself as the fearless leader, so I did a satire on the fearless leader. I satirized us all. Everybody was there. I was having a good time, just as I did in **Fighting American**, in the mid-Fifties for Harvey Comics. I like satire. At DC I satirized everybody. In **Mister Miracle** I did Houseroy and Funky Flashman. I thought they were great characters. I loved those characters. Satire to me is just having fun. It's a little like mischief and that's all it is. You'll find that it never hurts anybody."

Kirby recently did a more pointed satire when he collaborated with Steve Gerber on **Destroyer Duck**. This was a project to help raise money for Steve Gerber's lawsuit against Marvel over the ownership of Howard the Duck—a case which was ultimately settled out of court.

"I wrote the slogan— *Grab it all, own it all, drain it all*. That was my opinion. And if you can't have an opinion as an American, where can you have an opinion?"

Although both Stan Lee and Jack Kirby live in the Los Angeles area, they haven't seen one another for a very long time. Kirby's attorney did have direct contact with a film project which Lee is involved with. When Cannon Films began advertising their forthcoming **Captain America** film, Kirby found he could not remain silent.

"They'd advertised that Stan Lee created Captain America. He wasn't even at Timely then. We had to put a stop to that! We got Stan Lee's name taken off the film as the creator."

CLASSIC CREATIONS

Kirby created Marvel's quintessential villain—Doctor Doom—in the fifth issue of **The Fantastic Four**.

"Dr. Doom was the Man in the Iron Mask, which I felt was a classic character. I feel that there are certain characters that will never die. We'll tell them in different versions for the rest of the centuries. Dracula will never die. Frankenstein. They live inside us, and Dr. Doom will live inside us.

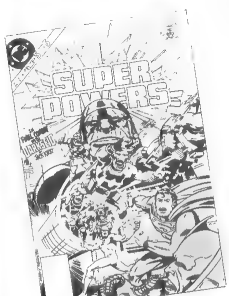
"Dr. Doom was a perfectionist," Kirby explains, revealing how he has always envisioned this character. "Actually Dr. Doom is a fine looking man, except that he's got a scratch on his chin because of the college accident in the laboratory. It's like, 'Why should I have a scratch on my chin and you don't?' If Dr. Doom took off his mask and you felt you were looking at a great looking guy, you'd be shocked because you would think he'd been hiding a monstrous face. You'd wonder why a guy would try to hide that. So he must have a mental aberration—he thinks he's ugly. What I did was a satire on a perfectionist. He felt that the tiny little scratch ruined the perfection of his face. And, of course, a mental aberration will give birth to evil of some kind, or conflict or jealousy. Dr. Doom is like that. That's the secret of Dr. Doom—he isn't ugly. He's handsome. But he's a perfectionist and perfectionists are their own devils."

Another popular creation of Kirby's is the former herald of Galactus—the Silver Surfer.

"I created the Silver Surfer because I felt that it was unfair for the Fantastic Four to

AFTER MARVEL—KIRBY'S WORK SEEMED TO LACK THE HUMAN TOUCH

SAVE THIS ISSUE FOR YOUR GRANDCHILDREN! IT'S PROBABLY A LANDMARK IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS!!
IT CAME FROM THE FIERY JAWS OF HOLOCAUST!
"THE"



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. . . MAYBE I'M FALLING FOR SUPERMAN SLOGANS—TRUTH AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, AND FAIRNESS.

just fight gangsters. They were people with powers fighting against people that didn't have any. So I created Galactus and I thought—there is God! What do you do with a guy like Galactus? I had to back away from Galactus because you can't punish him in any way—he's a cosmic being. He doesn't create any mischief, he's just surviving in his own way. He needs the energy of planets to survive. The Silver Surfer is the fallen angel. When Galactus tells the Surfer that he can't go out into space again, that is what God did to the fallen angel."

In the late Seventies Kirby did a new Silver Surfer story as a mass market graphic novel at a time when this form was still very new in American comics. This was a different version of the Silver Surfer, one which essentially ignored the continuity of the character that fans were familiar with. It showed the Surfer defying Galactus without his friendship for the Fantastic Four being the spur. It ended with the Surfer free to roam space even though this was not reflected in the Marvel Comics of that time.

"I wrote that book at a time when I was doing other things. I was talked into doing that book," Kirby explains, "and I didn't have the inspiration to make any great departures. I put a little more schmaltz into the beginning and felt that what I did was put another facet into the character. I felt that there was enough meat in the interplay between Galactus and the Silver Surfer to round out the book. It was successful."

WORDS TO LIVE BY

Nowadays, Kirby is hoping that he'll get the recognition for his contributions to the creation of Marvel Comics that eluded him during his tenure with the company. Even when cartoons used many of Kirby's own drawings as the basis for animating Captain America, the Hulk and Thor, his contribution was never acknowledged.

"They used the artwork as a background and moved the figures across the screen on the end of a stick. It was primitive animation. They adapted the stories exactly and wouldn't even give me credit for it."

When a second version of the Fantastic Four became a Saturday Morning cartoon in the late Seventies, Kirby was briefly involved, only to find his storyboards borrowed by Marvel and turned into a comic book story without his knowledge or permission. They even billed it as a special feature on the cover!

"Nobody ever tells us anything," Kirby states. "They just go ahead and do it, and that's their way. I never got paid for it as a comic strip. It's a grab deal. They just go ahead and do it whether you ask about it or not. I can't understand that kind of treatment.

"I don't know, maybe I'm falling for Superman slogans," Kirby admits. "Truth and justice for all, and fairness. I believe in that. I feel that the best things that we ever do are done under those conditions—that we cooperate with each other, that we're fair to each other and help each other. Comics had better sales under those conditions.

"In my opinion, the artist/writers were the ones that built comics. Comics are a visual narrative. An ordinary novel is the written word—a good novelist can visualize it for you with words. But in comics, it's my belief that you've got to integrate writing and art. That's what I do."

CF

WOULD IT HAVE BEEN THE ULTIMATE FF ISSUE . . .?

(SINCE JOHN BYRNE HAS LEFT MARVEL, PLANS FOR THE FF ANNIVERSARY ISSUE HAVE BEEN CHANGED. THIS IS WHAT JOHN BYRNE TOLD COMICS FEATURE BEFORE EXITING MARVEL)

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The 25th anniversary issue of the **Fantastic Four** will be issue 286 which at 64 pages is not just a double-issue, such as they did with FF 236, the 20th anniversary story, but a *triple*-issue! Writer/artist John Byrne describes FF 236 as being comparable to doing **Fantastic Four: The Movie** while 286, the triple-issue, will be the ultimate comic book version of the FF. It will tie into so many things which relate to the earlier years of the title.

Of his approach to these stories, Byrne says, "The whole thrust of FF 236, the 20th anniversary story, was to do a story that was more or less completely divorced from the regular book so that it could sort of stand on its own as a 'movie.'" By this he means that anyone who'd just stepped off the moon and had never heard of the FF could read Issue 236 and understand everything that was going on.

"In the 25th anniversary issue I'm going to be doing essentially the same thing in that you'll be able to pick up on these guys even if you've never seen them before. But I also want to fill it up with all kinds of little, almost subliminal, fanish type stuff that people will recognize as being references to earlier stories."

The title of **FF 286** is "Return to Monster Island," a reference which will mean something if you're at all familiar with **Fantastic Four** number one.

"The basic premise," Byrne reveals, "is that Reed, Sue, Johnny and She-Hulk are out in California and they go out to the old rocket base in Central City. It's all grown over with weeds and looking pretty scraggy, the way Cape Canaveral is these days. The first part of the issue, as it now stands, will be a retelling of **Fantastic Four** number one, as they tell their origin to She-Hulk—their first battle with the Mole Man and all that." But things start happening as the world is assaulted by wide-ranging earthquakes, which Reed Richards pinpoints as having their source at Monster Island. But Monster Island blew up at the end of FF 1—or did it?

"So they go tripping off to Monster Island," Byrne continues, "or where it used to be, and discover that what is now there is basically a very large hole—into which sea water has been pouring for years. It's been gushing down into the tunnels that the Mole Man appropriated from the Deviants and has managed, in many cases, to work its way quite a ways down into the vicinities of the center of the Earth. As a result, it's coming back as super-heated steam which is causing vast pressures to built up underneath the crust of the Earth —which is what's causing all of these giant earthquakes, globally.

"They are about to do what they can to undo this damage when. . . the Mole Man turns up. He's still there, still lurking around, and he's got all kinds of things happening involving that group of outcasts that he put together." One important facet of this story involves a sequence from **Fantastic Four** number one in which the Mole Man revealed his mammoth Valley of Diamonds, a concept which has not been dealt with since. But Byrne has managed to work it into the story in a surprising way.

"The Mole Man has discovered that the Valley of Diamonds is not in fact a natural phenomenon. The diamonds are mystical, and he's discovered that if he melts down the diamonds he gets this glop which, if you immerse yourself in it, you are transformed into whatever you are in your heart of hearts."

What follows is a story in which the FF try to avert final disaster for the world while the Mole Man is convinced that they're just there to make trouble for him again. But if that's not enough (remember this is a triple-issue filled with triple-threats and triple-promises), an important former member of the FF turns up there—The Thing. Certain changes planned for The Thing, which have not yet been revealed but will have come to pass by late summer, will have driven him to Monster Island, convinced that it is the only place for a monster such as himself. There, The Thing comes face to face with what he is in his heart of hearts.

The Thing is reunited with the FF in this adventure, and at the end, "We get back to New York for an anniversary party!" Byrne explains. "It's kind of a seperate story at the end of the issue which unveils the FF's new headquarters and has virtually the entire Marvel Universe guest-starring, including folks from Marvel."

Beyond **FF 286** will be the aftermath of the return of The Thing. For instance, what will happen to the She-Hulk, a character John Byrne happens to have a certain fondness for? "We will have to address the very serious questions of whether they will be the Fantastic Four or the Fantastic Five," Byrne reveals.

Other stories in the FF's future include a possible wedding in issue 300 and the finale to "The Last Galactus Story" continued from the pages of the now-defunct **Epic Illustrated**. It looks as though 1986 will be a landmark year for the **Fantastic Four** in numerous ways.

CF

LETTERS

Send all comments and correspondence to:
COMICS FEATURE
8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Suite 210
Canoga Park, CA 91304

Dear Hal,

I just read my first issue of **Comics Feature** and I thought it was just great. **Comics Feature** is one of the few magazines about comics that I read cover to cover. I like it that your magazine is not geared *totally* towards serious, hard-core comics collectors (although I am one of those people). The main thing that struck me after reading it was, "Where have you been?" I have been collecting for years now and I have never heard of you. I guess that's what happens when you become so involved in comics that you only buy them in specialty shops. I wouldn't dream of buying my stuff in the corner store. Well, in the corner store is where it all began and in the corner store is where I first came across **Comics Feature**. I loved every single one of your columns and departments, but I thought that you were missing one very essential ingredient—reviews. I would love to hear what you have to say about the comics currently being sold. Please consider it, then your mag would be perfect!

Anthony Haagsma
Samia, Ontario
Canada

Anthony—
I'm glad you found **Comics Feature.** Hopefully our presence outside of specialty shops (although we're in most of them as well!) will help recruit a whole new generation of comic fans. We're working on a regular reviews column.—Helpful Hal

Dear Editor,

Your February issue of CF was absolutely awesome! I thoroughly enjoyed it all. The Avengers article was informative and interesting.

Other articles I thoroughly enjoyed were the Feature News section, the Stan Lee article (great as usual Stan!), the Comics Consumer Guide—and I absolutely loved the Fun and Profit section. (That's another one for you, Mike!)

You've got a good thing going here guys! Your magazine is excellent and has very high quality.

Don Morrison
P.O. Box 53
Gulf, N.C. 27256

Don—
Happy you liked it—Happy Hal

Dear Comics Feature,

I just started reading your magazine this summer and I find it very interesting. I buy my issue every month at the grocery store. About your magazine. Good! Really well put together. I love your history on heroes, but my favorite part of your mag is your publisher's picks and shipping dates.

Comic Fan,
Lee Frederick
Rt 6 Box 84
Louisville, Md. 39339

Dear Sir,

I've been collecting **Comics Feature** for over a year now. I enjoy it immensely, but despite what you say, you are too Marvel-oriented. Just look at these covers! Ever since I can remember, Marvel heroes are more prominent than DC characters on your covers. Come on, let's see some DC people for a change!

Don't get me wrong; I love Marvel Comics, but DC is my absolute favourite.

DC has done so many things you haven't reported on. *CRISIS* was barely mentioned! Cripes, I thought you'd have Supergirl, Flash and Wonder Woman all over the place the past few months, not once. I notice CF hasn't mentioned the *second* crisis: *CRISIS ON CAPTIVE EARTH*. What's the scoop? DC's cancelled Superman! That is *the* comic event of '86! And Byrne is taking over with number one of a new Superman series! I have zillions of questions about this, but you've barely piqued my interest about this Byrne Superman comic. What about the new Flash!? The new Wonder Woman?! The Teen Titans splitup and the original Titans takeover? Don't you know about these important things in advance?!

Look, I'm not trying to belittle CF. I think it's great. But let's see the other half! DC & Marvel should be 50-50 in your book.

Yours,
Jacques Viau
212 Des Pyrenees
St-Lambert, Quebec
Canada J4S-1L4

P.S. You want regular correspondents? You got one.

Jacques—
We have begun to give more coverage to DC—for example our sidebar on Miller's Dark Knight last issue and our news section. But Marvel is a lot more cooperative than DC in arranging coverage. And not just with us—Hopeful Hal

Dear Hal,

I've only been reading your magazine a short time but I can tell it is going to be one of my favorites.

"I'm not really enthusiast Search or Animated Antics..."

"I enjoy the He Silver Age colum

Please do a feature on the X-Men.

In reply to Stan Lee's article in issue 40, the word "sidekick" derives from the Civil War when confederates were called sidekicks to the North. (So do I get that shiny new No-Prize or what?)

So, 'till Captain America turns traitor, MAKE MINE MARVEL! Also, 'till Happy Hal stops howling, MAKE MINE COMICS FEATURE!

Sincerely,
Kent Abbott

Kent—
Don't worry, I'll be howling for some time to come. Next issue we'll have a big mutant festival just for you!—Hal

Dear Hal,

I started picking up **Comics Feature** about the time I started going to college here in the small town of Kirksville because it was the only fanzine available. I saw a magazine tilted toward the line of Marvel, and away completely from the line of the independents. But it was this or nothing, so I bought more issues. Now, after just completing the February issue, I see a changing magazine. You are at least listing the line of independents now. You have a "Hal's Howlings" column. You published an article on how to get into the comics field business. These are positive additions to your magazine.

However, there's lots of room for improvement! Do features on the independents. Add some feature news about the independents. AND QUIT BUMPING COLUMNS! I want to know what your publisher's picks of the month are. **Daredevil** is Marvel's best written (in my opinion) comic right now, and I want to know if you agree.

The look back to the silver and golden ages are excellent columns (for awhile, it was the main thing to look forward to). The Games column must be kept; it is the best column to cover that subject that I've seen.

Ic about Strip

Mike. R. Beneke

roes, Animated Antics and
ns very much..."

Mark Middlen

I'm not really that enthusiastic about Strip Search or Animated Antics because I really don't care about or have never heard of the strip or company you're featuring.

You write an excellent letter column by the way.

Mike R. Beneke
346 MO Hall
Northeast Mo. State Univ.
Kirksville, MO 63501

Mike—
I'm pleased you like **Comics Feature**—I think. *At least you do think we're improving. An irregular column on the Independents is an addition we're exploring. But Animated Antics and Strip Tease are here to stay!—Hab!tual Ha!*

Dear Ha,

I am writing my first letter to **Comics Feature** as a result of your request for more mail!

I first started buying **Comics Feature** when it still cost $2.95. That price really put a strain in my budget. I am a collector of moderate means (900 comics) and I really valued your magazine. The reduction in your price was a godsend. Less color photographs does not matter as long as the quality of the articles is good. I have a few suggestions to make your magazine more successful with newsstand buyers.

You should first try to expand your news section and your consumer guide should include a brief summary about each issue.

You should limit the size of your Golden Age column and get rid of your Strip Search altogether. I enjoy the Heroes, Animated Antics and Silver Age columns very much.

I am a great fan of both Marvel and DC while the other titles are beyond my reach.

Sincerely,
Mark Middlen
104 Spruce St.
Winchendon, MA 01475

P.S. Your article on the Avengers was *super!*

Mark—
Now he wants Animated Antics but suggests we should dump Strip Search and reduce the size of the Golden Age. Nope! Not a chance. Comic Strips and Golden Age history will always have a home here. Settle in Roy Thomas and Ron Goulart—Hard-nosed Ha!

Dear Editor,

I'm very glad **Comics Feature** lowered its price—I've started buying it monthly again. I also want to commend the whole staff on the in-depth coverage you give on every subject you cover.

My chief complaint is with what you cover. I feel that all the coverage you give Marvel is unfair. DC Comics has been trying much harder to put out fresh and interesting ideas and character concepts than in the past. *Tales On Infinite Earths* illustrates a major commitment to restructuring the DC universe.

Sincerely,
David Coates
139 East 3rd St.
Williamsport, PA 17701

David—
OK! Ok, you win! Did you hear that Peggy May and Marv Wolfman? If you will cooperate, we've got loads of readers who want to hear what you're doing—Hesitant Ha!

Dear Mr. Schuster,

Ha! I wasn't the only one who noticed the leaning toward Marvel in your magazine. Yes, I know DC has been featured in several Golden Age articles of late, but what about their new stuff? This is where the problem lies. Allow me to make a few suggestions for future DC stories: Blue Beetle (Why not preview his upcoming comic?), Batman (Take a look at how Doug Moench is handling him!), Green Lantern (Lots of changes with the Crisis), Superman (Interview John Byrne!) and Amethyst (A good title that deserves the attention.)

A tip of the hat to Mike Benton. I really enjoy Fun & Profit.

Thanks for taking me up on my idea to give the letters section a title. A contest is a good way to do it.

Enjoy Life.

Sincerely,
Floyd
ex-alias "M."
Route 12, Box 142
Spartanburg, SC 29302

Floyd—
That's enough already!—Unhappy Ha!

We have some entries in our "Name-the-Letters-Section" contest. Both Floyd of Spartanburg, SC and Mike Beneke of Kirksville, MO suggest *Featured Fans*. Mike also sends in *Fan Fanatics, Fanatical Writings* and the colorful *Hollers to Happy Ha!* (that last does have a ring to it). Kyle Owens of Wise, VA offers *The Rebuttal*, Gregory Patterson of Oak City, NC puts forth *Comics Comments* and from E. Lynne, Ct's Tom Hammell comes *Best Letters* and *CFL* (Comics Feature Letters). John Hutchinson of Havre de Grace, MD thinks we should call it either *Comics Line* or *Readers Reviews* but Kent Abbott would prefer *Comics Correspondence* or *Feature Fanmail*. On the other hand, Louisville, Mo's Lee Frederick strongly urges *Feature Feedback* or *Fan Feedback* while Mark Middlen of Winchester, MA is as dead set on *Comics Letters Feature* and *Comics Letters Spotlight* as Patrick Borezo of Venice, FL is on *Comic Talk* and *Letters to the Head Hero*.

Perhaps calling it just *Letters* isn't such a bad idea after all!

Since nothing catches my fancy, the contest remains open. Remember, to win a free one year subscription to **Comics Feature** just do the impossible—suggest a name that pleases Happy Ha!

A couple of other notes of interest: Gregory Patterson of Oak City, NC writes in to let us know that there are a couple of coloring mistakes in issue 41 (Hopefully he's noticed the improvement in the last couple of issues—the Art Director is very proud of them!) Larry King of Morrisville, VT wants us to know that "there are no 'Moral Majority' censors involved with animation. Instead you should point the finger of guilt at Action for Children's Television, which is a *liberal* organization, not a conservative one!" (Perhaps Liberals aren't always so liberal, after all.) D.M. Hanberg wants to know why, "the issues with Snider-Man and the Avengers on the covers are both numbered 40." (*Would you believe the typesetter stuttered?*)—

Happy Ha!

CF

Comics Consumer Guide

DC COMICS

SHIPPING 3/17/86

☐**SON OF AMBUSH BUG** 1—(of 6) Giffen/Fleming/Oskner

☐**DC COMICS PRESENTS 95**—Superman & Hawkman by Isabella/Gold/Howell/Anderson. Leads into ongoing Hawkman.

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA 252—Conway/McDonnell/Wray

FURY OF FIRESTORM 49—Copway/Brozowski/Machlan

HEX 11—Fleisher/Texeira/Garzon

☐**TALES OF THE TEEN 67**—Wolfman/Garcia-Lopez/Tanghal. Originally in **NEW TEEN TITANS 8.**

☐**LEGEND OF WONDER WOMAN 3**—(of 4) Busiek & Robbins/P-I-C.

☐**VIGILANTE 31**—Direct sales only. Kupperberg/Patton/Magyar.

☐**THE OUTSIDERS 9**—Direct sales only. Barr & Aparo/P-I-C.

☐**ROOTS OF THE SWAMP THING 1**—Direct sales only. Wein & Wrightson/P-I-C. Originally presented in SWAMP THING 1 & 2.

SHIPPING 3/10/86

☐**BATMAN 397**—Moench & Mandrake/P-I-C. Two-Face is back.

☐**SUPERMAN 421**—Bates/Swan/Hunt. Superman & Mxyzptlk.

☐**STAR TREK 28**—Duane/Morrow-P-I/Brozowski & Giordano.

☐**SECRET ORIGINS 4**—Firestorm by Conway/Tuska/Marcos/Milgrom.

☐**AMAZING MAN 7**—Rozakis/DeStefano.

☐**BLUE BEETLE 2**—Wein/Cullins/Patterson.

☐**ELVIRA'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY 5**

☐**G.I. COMBAT 264**—KANIGHER/Glanzman-P-I/Kubert.

☐**LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES 24**—Direct sales only. Levitz/LaRocque/Mahlstedt.

☐**ELECTRIC WARRIOR 3**—Direct sales only. Moench & Baikie/P-I-C.

☐**METALZOIC GRAPHIC NOVEL**—Mills & O'Neill. Robotic creatures rule. Direct sales only.

SHIPPING 3/25/86

SWAMP THING 50—Moore/Bissette/Totleben. Double-sized conclusion

☐**ADVENTURES OF THE OUTSIDERS 35**—Barr/Davis/Neary.

☐**GREEN LANTERN CORPS. 202**—Englehart/Staton/Farmer/Patterson

☐**WARLORD 107**—Fleisher/Randall

☐**BLUE DEVIL 26**—Mishkin & Cohn/Kupperberg/Collins/Cullins & Martin. Special *baseball* issue!

☐**WHO'S WHO 17**—of 24

☐**BOOSTER GOLD 6**—W-P by Jurgens/DeCarlo. *Origin issue!*

☐**INFINITY INC. 28**—Direct sales only. Thomas/McFarlane/DeZuniga

☐**THE NEW TEEN TITANS 22**—Wolfman/Barreto/Tanghal.

☐**BATMAN—THE DARK KNIGHT 2**—(of 4) Direct sales only. Frank Miller

SHIPPING 4/10/86

☐**TALES OF THE LEGION OF SUPER HEROES 337**—Levitz/Lightle/Maahlan/Mahlstedt.

☐**ACTION 581**—Bates & Schaffenberger/P-I.

☐**DETECTIVE 584**—Moench/Colan/B. Smith/Giordano. Batman and Robin vs. Two-Face.

☐**ALL-STAR SQUADRON 59**—R. & D. Thomas/Jones/Colleta/DeZuniga.

☐**V 18**—Final issue! Kupperberg/Cowan/Giordano.

☐**DC CHALLENGE 9**—Direct sales only. (of 12) Thomas/Heck/Magyar/Brozowski/Machlan. Metron and the Guardians try to figure this mess out! Guest-stars are JLA, Titans and The Outsiders!

☐**LORDS OF THE ULTRA-REALM 2**—(of 6) Direct sales only. Moench & Broderick/P-I-C

☐**THE SHADOW 3 (of 4)** Direct sales only. W-P-I-C Howard Chaykin.

☐**LAST DAYS OF THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA SPECIAL 1**—Direct sales only. Thomas/Ross/Gustovich. The ultimate sequel to the first Crisis—the JSA battle the gods themselves to save Earth. (64-page special.)

MARVEL

SHIPPING 3/4/86

☐**CLOAK & DAGGER 7**—Mantlo/Silvestri/Austin.

☐**DAREDEVIL 232**—Miller/Mazzucchelli.

☐**NEW MUTANTS 41**—Claremont/Guice/Wiacek. Mirage solo story.

QUESTPROBE 4—Claremont/Brigman/Austin. The latest in the tie-ins with the Scott Adams computer games, starring The X-Men and Magneto.

☐**SQUADRON SUPREME 11**—Gruenwald/Ryan/DeLaRosa.

☐**WEB OF SPIDER-MAN 16**—Michelinie/Silvestri/Baker.

☐**WEST COAST AVENGERS 10**—Englehart/Milgrom/Sinnott

☐**CONAN THE KING 35**—Kram/Hunt/Nichols. Cober by Hunt/Gil.

☐**HE-MAN AND THE MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE 2**—Carlin/Wilson/Janke.

SHIPPING 3/17/86

☐**ALPHA FLIGHT 36**—Mantlo/Rosa/Talaoc. Snowbird goes into labor.

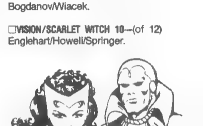
☐**AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 278**—Defalco/Harris. The fate of The Wraith!

☐**CAPTAIN AMERICA 319**—Gruenwald/Neary/Sinnott.

GROO THE WANDERER 17—Argones with Evanier. An Epic direct and newsstand comic.

☐**POWER PACK 24**—Simonson/Bogdanov/Wiacek.

☐**VISION/SCARLET WITCH 10**—(of 12) Englehart/Howell/Springer.



☐**FANTASTIC FOUR INDEX 8**

☐**THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE 8**

☐**SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN 125**—Kwapisz & Owsley/Cover by Golden

☐**EWOKS 8**—Manak/Kramer/D'Agostino.

SHIPPING 3/24/86

☐**AVENGERS 269**—Stern/J. Buscema/Palmer. Kang vs. Kang war.

☐**CONAN THE BARBARIAN 184**—Owsley/J. Buscema/Chan

☐**ETERNALS 10**—(of 12) Simonson/Sal Buscema.

☐**G.I. JOE 49**—Hama/Whigham/Mushynsky/Zeck

☐**INCREDIBLE HULK 321**—Milgrom is writer and artist.

☐**MARVEL TALES 189**—Lee/Romita/Espolito. Reprinting SPIDER-MAN issue 49.

☐**POWER MAN 124**—Owsley/Bright/Acerno/Cover by Mike Zeck.

SOLOMON KANE 6—(of 6) Macchio/Ridgeway/Williamson/Cover by Dan Green.

X-MEN 207—Claremont/Romita, Jr./Green.

MARVEL SAGA 8

MARVEL FANFARE 27—Direct sales only. (Mantlo/Salmons Featuring Daredevil.

MUPPET BABIES 8—Kay/Severin

SHIPPING 3/25/86

ELFQUEST 12—Wendy & Richard Pini An Epic direct & newsstand comic.

FANTASTIC FOUR 292—Byrne Is writer & penciller. Nick Fury goes back in time to kill Hitler and the FF must stop him!

IRON MAN 208—O'Neil/Bright/Akin/Garvey.

PETER PARKER 116—David/Buckler/McLeod/Cover by Buckler

SECTAURS 7—Mantlo/Geiger/Williams.

STAR WARS 106—Duffy/Martin

THOR 369—Simonson/S.Buscema

TRANSFORMERS 18—Budiansky/Perlin/Williams

X-FACTOR 6—Layton/Guice/Rubinstein

MARVEL TEAM-UP INDEX 4

DOCTOR WHO 22—Direct sales only

SAVAGE TALES 5

CARE BEARS 5—Kay/post/Edelman

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ELEMENTALS SPECIAL 1

ROBOTECH THE NEW GENERATION Issue 6

ROBOTECH THE MACROSS SAGA 10

DELUXE

THUNDER AGENTS 5

ECLIPSE

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TALES OF TERROR 5

THE TWISTED TALES OF BRUCE JONES 3

SCOUT 5

SHIPPING 3/11/86

SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT 5

THE OFFICIAL CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS INDEX 1

SHIPPING 3/18/86

MR. MONSTER'S THREE-DIMENSIONAL HI-OCTANE HORROR 3-D 1

THE TWISTED TALES OF BRUCE JONES 4

SHIPPING 3/25/86

MIRACLEMAN 7

THE NEW DNAgents 7

LASER ERASER and PRESSBUTTON Issue 5

FIRST

SHIPPING 2/28/86

NEXUS 22

BADGER 13

SHIPPING 3/7/86

GRIMJACK 24

ALTER EGO 2 (of 4)

SHIPPING 3/15/86

AMERICAN FLAGG 31

DYNAMO JOE 3

SHIPPING 3/21/86

JON SABLE 38

HAWKMOON: JEWEL IN THE SKULL 2 (of 4)

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Games

BY STEVE PERRIN

This column marks my first effort as a full-time freelance writer. I no longer have the drag of going to any other office but my typing desk. My livlihood depends entirely on the products of my fevered brain. Wish me luck, Gentle Readers (both of you), I may need all I can get.

Watch for **Robot Warrior** from the Hero Games division of I.C.E. (about which, more later) which I am doing with George MacDonald. I'm also editing a couple of products for that venerable firm, and putting together a couple of **Fantasy Hero** adventure packages for eventual publication.

Mayfair Games should have my Firestorm adventure out within a few months of your reading this. (And I am theoretically working on an All-Star Squadron Sourcebook for the same game. This latter project is not yet official, but I have hopes it will be soon.)

MERGINGS AND MUSINGS

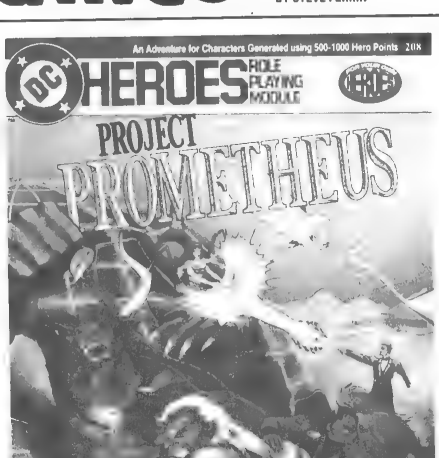
Hero Games division of I.C.E.? What's an I.C.E. you ask? What am I talking about?

A few years ago, some D&D players who had found their own solution to the problems every serious player finds in D&D managed to gather about $300,000 in investment money and start their own company, Iron Crown Enterprises. For the first couple of years they existed on the periphery of the industry, publishing a series of books unified in title by the term "Law" (**Spell Law**—a magic system, **Arms Law**—a complex chart-driven weapons and combat system, etc.). These fantasy role-playing rules received a mix of favorable and unfavorable reviews from the gaming press in all of its incarnations and enjoyed modest sales.

Then, someone in the company hit on the bright idea of talking to the people in charge of licensing products based on J.R.R. Tolkien's **Lord of the Rings**. Lo and behold, no one had secured the gaming rights recently (The now-defunct Heritage Games of Texas had the rights for a while, but the rights reverted when the company died.). The Tolkien-licensers were impressed by I.C.E.'s presentation, and the new licensees debuted their first Tolkien-related product, a map of *all* of Middle-Earth, at the annual Origins game show in 1983.

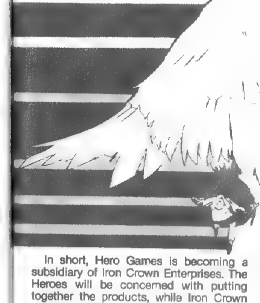
Since then, I.C.E. has managed to get their products into most bookstore chains and generally expand their market. They are distributed almost as well as **Dungeons and Dragons** in all of its many permutations and combinations.

In the meanwhile, Hero Games has been a shoestring success story. Lacking I.C.E.'s initial capitalization, the Heroes have still managed to gain a sizable market share with their innovative **Champions** superhero game and assorted spinoffs such as **Fantasy Hero**, which use the same game system and are compatible with the original.


An Adventure for Characters Generated using 500-1000 Hero Points 2108
DC HEROES
ROLE PLAYING MODULE
PROJECT PROMETHEUS
by Greg Gorden and Lee Manikoff
© 1983 D.C. Comics

THIS IS THE FIRST DC HEROES SCENARIO THAT ENCOURAGES USING YOUR OWN CHARACTERS

Now the Heroes are looking for a rest and a chance to get out from under the production and publication problems and concentrate on the creative end of game design. I.C.E. wants to diversify away from just Tolkien, but their various attempts at science fiction expansions of their basic fantasy game system (**Space Law**, **Future Law**, **Tech Law**) have not managed to stir up the interest they want. Taking over a ready-made seller like **Champions** is just what they are looking for.



In short, Hero Games is becoming a subsidiary of Iron Crown Enterprises. The Heroes will be concerned with putting together the products, while Iron Crown gets the products sold. It looks like an ideal mating. Iron Crown has promised to get many more products out on the shelves than Hero, with its more limited resources, has been able to. This is good news for the **Champions** fans who have been demanding more products for several years now.

Whether this is a marriage made in Heaven, or just another paving stone on the eight-lane superhighway to Hell, remains to be seen. As a regular, and sometimes frustrated, contributor to Hero's products, I am anxious to see the final results.

WHEEL OF DESTRUCTION

Mayfair, publishers of the official **DC Heroes** game, are finally getting a fair quantity of support material out. First up is a solitaire scenario, using a typically insane plan by the Joker to blow up various Gotham City landmarks, using a perverse version of a television game show to pick the targets.

The starring player character is the Batman. Author Matthew Costello has given the Darknight Detective a collection of weapons and vehicles with which to try to track down the Joker.

Costello has had quite a bit of experience writing solitaire scenarios—where the player effectively plays against the book without need for another player for several different game systems. It's an ideal way to get more familiar with the DC Heroes system and while away the lonely hours until you can get the usual playing group together again. As far as I can tell, there are no slips in which paragraph leads to which event (this is very difficult to judge without playing the scenario for several hours), which can be the bane of a solitaire.

The scenario even accounts for the possibility of Batman's capture by the Joker. In that case, the player can be either Hawkman (a personal favorite), Nightwing or Robin—attempting to find their crimefighting friend and rescue both Batman and the Commissioner.

Costello has captured the zany psychopathy of the Joker very well. I give this scenario the highest praise—it would make a good Batman story.

PROJECT PROMETHEUS

This **DC Heroes** scenario is the first of a series in which the players are supposed to use their own characters instead of regular DC Heroes such as Batman, Firestorm or the like. However the powers that be at Mayfair obviously did not trust players to already have their own characters in use. They provide a four-character group, the Justice Crusaders. Compared to the real members of the DC universe as described in the **DC Heroes** rules and other published scenarios, the heroes seem a bit underpowered—which points up one of the potential problems of running your own character in the game. Using their starting numbers, it is hard to create a hero who can stand up with the usual members of the DC universe.

However, the villains provided are not particularly gnarly, either, so the scenario balances out very well. A new King Minos has arisen on Crete and wants to return the island to the glories of yore. His daughter, a minor-league mentalist, is naturally called Ariadne. Minos has a mechanical guardian, Talos, and a mutated white eagle called The White Eagle (a reference to a relatively obscure part of the legends of Crete).

Also lined up with Minos are Arachnae—a mutated spiderwoman with mentalist abilities and Minotaur—who lives up to his name. These two are the flies in the ointment—schemers who intend to turn a defensive device into a mind control web which will allow Arachnae to take over the entire Mediterranean.

Our heroes are given ample opportunity to go to Crete, either as Minos's guest or as spies for the US Government (which objects to Minos suborning Dr. Daedalus—the mastermind behind the above-mentioned protective device). The heroes make friends or enemies among the inhabitants of Crete before the villains attempt their takeover, and are generally given a lot of choices and decisions to make before they must confront the badguys.

All the bases seem to be covered here, including instructions on how to run a full-scale military assault on the island if the heroes don't accomplish their purpose on time. There is a place for investigation, character interaction, races against horrible consequences and last minute rescues. This is a very satisfactory scenario that gives the players a chance to see that lower level characters can actually be a lot of fun to play. This counters an impression that playing the relatively high-powered scenarioes **Siege** (featuring the original JLA) and **Blood Feud** (featuring the Teen Titans and Brotherhood of Evil) may give.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Wheel of Destruction and **Project Prometheus**
Mayfair Games, Inc. P.O. Box 48539, Niles II. 60648-0539

CF

STEVE PERRIN CREATED BOTH THE ELFQUEST *AND* SUPERWORLD *GAMES ALONG WITH MANY OTHER ITEMS.*

FUN & PROFIT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

1) *NOTHING AT ALL.* Surprisingly enough, sometimes the best way to preserve some comics is to do nothing at all. The trick is to do nothing *intelligently.*

By "nothing," I mean no plastic bags, no cardboard boxes or backing, no climate controlled vaults. Instead, simply place your books in a relatively dark, cool and dry area that is free of insects, extreme changes in temperature and poking noses of kids/mothers/spouses/etc.

COST PER COMIC: $0.00 per comic.

RECOMMENDED COMICS FOR STORAGE: All comics less than ten years old which are worth less than $10.

2) *PLASTIC BAGS.* These offer the next cheapest form of protection, but beware. Plastic bags slowly disintegrate and give off harmful vapors that can yellow and age your comics.

The only time I use plastic bags to store comics is when I wish to either sell, transport or protect them *temporarily.*

COST PER COMIC: $0.03 per comic.

RECOMMENDED COMICS FOR STORAGE: Comics worth less than $10 which are to be sold, traded or moved.

3) *MYLITE BAGS.* These are thinner than the heavy Mylar bags and cheaper. Their chief value is that they protect a comic from the acids in other comics which can migrate and age surrounding comic books. They do not, however, offer any support to a comic because they are so thin.

COST PER COMIC: $0.10 per comic.

RECOMMENDED COMICS FOR STORAGE: Comics worth between $2 and $10 dollars which are less than 20 years old.

THE COMICS FEATURE GUIDE TO STORING YOUR COLLECTION

4) *MYLITE BAG WITH ACID-FREE CARDBOARD BACKING.* You really should place an acid-free cardboard backing behind some comics stored in Mylites in order to support the spine and prevent damage in storage.

COST PER COMIC: $.15 per comic.

RECOMMENDED COMICS FOR STORAGE: All comics worth between $2 and $20 which are over 20 years old.

5) *MYLAR BAGS.* The standard for good comic book protection. These come in a wide variety of flavors, from "snugs" to "time-locks" to three-hole punched notebook inserts.

They all offer both archival-quality protection *and* strong support for your comics.

COSTS PER COMIC: $.50 per comic.

RECOMMENDED COMICS FOR STORAGE: Any comic worth more than $10. Any comic older than 25 years which has started to noticably age.

6) *Mylar Bag with Acid-Free and Alkaline-Buffered Cardboard Backing.* Even in a Mylar bag, a comic's corners can sometimes get "bumped." Since a crease or ding can decrease the value of an expensive comic, you may wish to put an acid-free, *alkaline buffered* piece of cardboard in the Mylar behind the book.

The alkaline buffering in the cardboard actually helps neutralize some of the comic's acids, so this gives extra protection (at a slightly higher cost than simple acid-free cardboard).

COST PER COMIC: $.70

RECOMMENDED COMICS FOR STORAGE: Any comic worth more than $50. Any comic older than 30 years worth more than $10.

7) *ENCAPSULATED MYLAR BAG WITH INERT GASES.* Even in an unsealed Mylar bag, oxidation and acidification occurs. Some dealers are offering to place your ultra-valuable comics inside a Mylar bag and then fill the bag with nitrogen or helium and seal it off. This effectively slows the aging process down to near-zero.

Of course you won't be able to read the comic, unless you cut the bag and let the gases out. A really valuable comic, however, is usually only read once or twice a year, if at all anyway.

COST PER COMIC: $3.00 to $5.00

RECOMMENDED COMICS FOR STORAGE: Comics more than 25 years old worth over $100.

Notice several things about these recommendations. First, the age of a comic is almost as important as its value when you are deciding how to store it.

For example, a nice comic that is over 35 years old may only be worth $5—the same as a "hot" issue of G.I.Joe from last year.

Yet because of its age, the older comic needs more protection than the relatively newer books.

Quite frankly, I wouldn't waste the money on Mylar bags for most comics published in the last 15 years, unless they are high-dollar books in mint perfect condition.

If you are still confused about the best way to protect your comics, you can always use this general guideline:

Spend about five percent of the book's retail worth to protect it.

This means that a book should be worth at least $2 before you sock it away in a Mylite bag, and $10 before you use a Mylar bag.

Of course if money is no object, then stick everything in heremetically sealed Mylar bags and put them in climate controlled vaults which are guaranteed against nuclear attacks.

Unless, of course, they have corn flakes on their pages.

HOT TIPS

Making money by speculating in new comics is tough. You can't just buy what looks obviously "hot" because everybody else is doing the same thing.

You don't have to be a genius to know that, for example, **X-Factor** will act like a "hot" comic for awhile.

The trick is to search out those not-so-obvious candidates for a hot book, and get them before the rush is on.

I'll go out on a limb this time, and steer you to some new books that you might not think of as obvious investment items.

As I write this, the first issue of Marvel's **Masters of the Universe** comic has hit the comic shops.

Here are my predictions: (1) Everybody will think this comic is HOT. (2) The comic will be hot, for awhile. (3) The comic will gradually fall off in sales. (4) Years from now, the comic will be hot again.

Confusing?

Okay, after the success of **G.I. Joe** and Marvel's Star comic, **Thundercats**, collectors and dealers now believe that Saturday morning cartoon tie-in comic books are hot.

Because there is a popular perception that such comics are "hot," everybody will speculate and buy heavy of this title. They don't want to get caught short, like they did on the **G.I. Joe** or **Thundercat** title.

Since everybody is agressively buying the book, it will certainly look "hot."

As the true collector market emerges for this comic, people will discover that there is not yet enough collectors who want to pay the prices for all the stockpiled first issues.

Consequently, **Masters of the Universe** cools off and collectors will stop buying so heavily of the early issues.

So far, simple enough. This is the general trend for books that are percieved *in advance* as being potentially "hot."

I think, however, that two to three years from now (if the title is still being published), a new group of collectors will discover the title and back issue prices may indeed eventually soar.

Why? Because the comic collectors of tomorrow are glued to the television sets of today. The **Masters of the Universe** is *the* show of the pre-comic collecting set. As they gradually enter the field, these younger collectors will seek out the comic characters they are familiar with.

I think that the kids five years from now will be as nostalgic about Skeletor and He-Man as we are about the original X-Men or the Justice Society of America.

My advice: buy the early issues (2, 3 and 4)in small amounts, and watch this one to be a sleeper—at least over the years to come.

WILL ROBOTS REPLACE SUPERHEROES?
SOON...
I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT, ARTOO...
...THIS IS THE ADDRESS OF OUR NEW MASTER, LOTT KEANS, THE CRYSTAL MERCHANT!

MIKE BENTON is the author of *Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit* (Crown Publishers, $8.95). Now available at your local bookstore or comic book specialty shop.

MORE TIPS

It's no secret that robots and Japanese toys are emerging as one of the strongest new collectible fields, and I think comic collectors should pay close attention.

Already we have over a dozen comic book titles based on robots, toy series or a combination of toy/robot/cartoon series (as in the case of the Japanese properties).

Look at some of the comics: **Transformers**, **Droids**, **Robotech**, and even a book called **Toy Boy** (with art by Neal Adams).

Like the **Masters of the Universe**, I think that these comics may have a long-lasting appeal for the upcoming (and current) robot-crazed generation.

In Japan, robot characters have replaced super-heroes as the cultural heroes. There are hundreds of Japanese comics published every year with robots as the main or featured characters.

Not every robot or toy comic will make it big, of course. I do think, however, that we are still a long way from interest peaking in these kinds of comics.

If you're looking for some comics that will increase in value over the next five-year period, check out the new robot/toy/Japanese spin-off titles.

CF

SPIDER-MAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

With three Spider books running new stories now (**Web of Spider-Man, Peter Parker the Spectacular Spider-Man** and the original **Amazing Spider-Man**) the writers are coordinating their efforts so they won't contradict each other. In fact, they try to tie events in the three books together where logical. In **Web of Spider-Man**, Peter Davids is taking a darker approach in the stories, describing it as being "somewhat like **Hill Street Blues**," including the white and black credits block at the end of each story. A forthcoming installment will feature the return of a villain who was beaten up by Spider-Man, showing what happens when a normal man is worked over by a superhero. Spidey's black costume will also be seen more often, making Spidey the only superhero who regularly employs two different costumes.

Also in the future is the Spider-Man movie, which may be released as early as Christmas of '86. In 1987, Spider-Man will be 25 years old. It hardly seems like it's been that long for those of us who, as young fans, bought his early adventures. The misfit hero has managed to fit in quite well for a quarter of a century! CF

X-MEN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

The first eleven issues of **The X-Men** were drawn by Jack Kirby, and other than a nagging reuse of The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in numbers 4,5,6 and 7, they were an interesting run, climaxing in 10 which introduced Ka-Zar and the Savage Land in a rousing adventure which took place all in one issue. Although Kirby did one more issue, almost anything would seem an anticlimax after everything Kirby came up with in 10.

While the title lasted for years after Kirby left it, it seemed to be searching for itself, never certain which direction to go or what to do with the characters. They moved from one adventure to another with very little impact on them as human beings. There were exceptions, though.

THE ROY THOMAS YEARS

Before Stan Lee left the book as writer with #20 (when Roy Thomas replaced him), Prof. X's half-brother, Cain Marko (the Juggernaut) was introduced in #12 and #14 brought on The Sentinels, the latter being as closely identified with the X-Men as anything anyone else ever did in the series.

By this time the character of the Beast had been altered so that he was an intelligent, eloquent personality rather than a Ben Grimm clone. Thus the original X-Men included Professor X (who was killed off by Thomas in #42 and brought back by him in #65), Cyclops (who fires powerful optic blasts and is little different today than when he was introduced in 1963 when he was called "Slim" Summers, a nickname that was quickly dropped), Iceman (Bobby Drake, who could ice up his body and whose origin appeared in issues #44-46), the Angel (whose sole power is that of flight due to his wings and whose origin appeared in #14), the Beast (Hank McCoy who underwent a metamorphosis in **Amazing Adventures #11** into a blue-furred character who then went on to become involved with the Avengers and later the Defenders as had both Iceman and The Angel), Marvel Girl (Jean Grey, who died in #100 only to be reborn as Phoenix, whose powers dwarfed those she previously had and who then went out of control as Dark Phoenix).

There were other part-time X-Men such as the Mimic who first fought them in #19, and then reformed to join the group in #27-29 until he lost his powers.

Alex Summers (Havok) first turned up in #54 and although he fought alongside the X-men after learning to control his power, he was never formally a member and turns up only now and then.

The original X-Men had some interesting high points such as numbers 50 and 51 which were drawn by Jim Steranko, but the most memorable issues were at the end of the original run when Roy Thomas scripted and Neal Adams pencilled numbers 56-63 and 65. Tom Palmer inked, and even when Don Heck did 64 as a fill-in issue. It was drawn to imitate Adams so amazingly that you have to look twice at it to see that it's merely a fine imitation. Those last few issues brought the X-Men together in one gripping story after another which balanced character and plot in a manner more similar to what would be done in the book under Chris Claremont years later. The art is some of Neal Adams most enervating work and he also plotted #65, which formed a moving climax to the run. (These Adams issues were reprinted by Marvel in a special high quality format available only in comic stores). The run lasted one more issue, but even with the Hulk as a guest star the book seemed dead on its feet after the high energy impact of the Thomas/Adams issues.

Several months later the title was revived as a reprint book, ostensibly to keep the characters active in some form due to undisclosed plans that Marvel had for them.

THE NEW X-MEN!

Whatever those plans were, they were kicked around, abandoned and changed until 4 1/2 years later when **Giant Size X-Men #1** appeared in 1975 (recently reprinted in a special quality edition available in comic shops).

Marvel had come up with the idea that if they could put together a team composed of characters from many nations, they'd

The idea was: A team composed of characters from many nations might be a hit in the overseas market. Roy Thomas suggested revising the X-Men. The result was the New X-Men and the rest is history.

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have a big hit in the overseas market. Roy Thomas suggested the X-Men as an ideal format for this and the team underwent revisions. Although Prof. X was still the ever-present mentor, it was decided to keep Cyclops in order to have some tie between the new X-Men and the old X-Men. It was also felt that he was the most interesting member of the old team due to his tragic overtones in that he could never look at another human being with his unshielded eyes.

The new X-Men were gathered together by Prof. X in **Giant Size #1**. They consisted of Nightcrawler (who can teleport), and Wolverine(a Canadian who was originally part of what would become known as Alpha Flight but who quit to become a free agent when Xavier offered him the chance to employ his heightened sense and adamantium plated skeleton).

Storm (an orphan who grew up in the wilds of Kenya, East Africa and who as a child lived as a thief in the streets until maturing into a locally worshipped goddess due to her control of weather), Colossus (aka Peter Rasputin, a Russian who uses his ability to turn his body into something akin to armor plating for international benefit after being convinced by Professor X), Thunderbird (an American Indian, on borrowed time from the start as he was created solely to be killed off in his third outing in **X-Men 95**), Shadow Cat (also known as Ariel and Kitty Pryde, the newest and youngest X-Man, who, at only fourteen, is possessed of the ability to phase through solid objects much as the Vision of the Avengers can).

Len Wein, who essentially created the new X-Men, was only involved with the title for the first couple of stories, then left the book. Chris Claremont began writing with **X-Men 94**, the second story of the new X-Men.

The artist on the new X-men up through issue 107 was Dave Cockrum. His approach to the X-Men was quite different from those of either John Byrne or Paul Smith and his work on the early issues suffers only in comparison to the more slick approach brought to the book later. Len Wein conceived these new X-Men as being teenagers and this is how Cockrum drew them. Claremont later decided their ages should be more varied, but when Cockrum returned to the title for several months beginning with #145, he drew them all like teenagers again which made it all seem very awkward. Whether for this reason or post-Byrne depression, sales slumped until Paul Smith took over the title (a 50,000 copy jump was recorded with his first issue), although Smith left to be replaced by John Romita, Jr.

WHEN BYRNE TAKES OVER

Chris Claremont began putting the new X-Men through changes almost from the start, but it was when John Byrne began his long stint on the title (#108-143) that the book really came alive as this team meshed the way an artist/writer team should. John Byrne put a lot of his own input into the stories and would become annoyed when something he drew one way would be scripted by Claremont another way later, which led to occasional creative conflicts. It was over this sort of frustration, and a refusal by Claremont to give Byrne equal say in the direction the stories would go, that he finally left the title to be writer/artist on the **Fantastic Four**. Byrne took a sort of Canadian version of the X-Men which he'd created in the title, called Alpha Flight, and gave it its own magazine.

One can only wonder where the book would have gone had Byrne stayed with it as two of his last issues, **X-Men #141-142** contained one of the best stories to ever appear in the title. "Days of Future Past" was a time travel tale involving dual, related stories. The Kitty Pryde of years in the future is able to briefly have her mind sent into her past self in order to warn the X-Men so that they can prevent the murder of a presidential candidate which would ultimately mean the end of the world in the future. While the present day X-Men perform their mission, we see the future from which Kitty Pryde briefly escaped, a future where Sentinels hunt down and capture or destroy any superpowered being, whether mutant or not. One by one we see the murder of all the X-Men we know, those of Storm and Wolverine being the most shocking.

HEROES

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There are many standout stories in the Claremont/Byrne series. Issues #111-116 are especially good, as are the Dark Phoenix stories. This series, which apparently involved Jean Grey's powers warping and twisting her into the insane Dark Phoenix, climaxed in #137 when she seemingly committed suicide in order to prevent Dark Phoenix from ever rising again. But that's not how Chris Claremont planned it. He'd originally written #137 so that Jean Grey was stripped of her powers forever because Dark Phoenix had destroyed a planet of four billion people. But when editor Jim Shooter saw the pencilled pages he rejected them because even though Claremont's editor, Jim Salicrup, had approved the story, Shooter hadn't seen it until it was drawn. Shooter felt that Phoenix was getting off too lightly and should be imprisoned under eternal torture for her acts, even though she was insane at the time she committed them. Rather than do that, Claremont just had her kill herself with an ancient Kree weapon left on the moon in the blue area. Even this was sabotaged by his disputes with John Byrne because he wanted it to be a weapon in the house of The Watcher which exists in that blue area, but when Byrne drew those pages he didn't like that idea and changed it. By this time, Claremont was so depressed over the entire situation that he just let it go, but Byrne's actions could only have hastened the breakup of the team.

DIVERSE HANDS

Paul Smith's vivid and powerful art brought just as much verve to the title as Byrne's very different style did. Whereas inker Bob Wiacek isn't suited to some pencillers, his style meshes perfectly with Smith, just as Austin's brought out every stroke of power in Byrne's pencils. The real test is that reproduction of the Smith/Wiacek art is crisp and clear with no haziness to the art at all, whereas Byrne's inking of his own pencils is consistently plagued by muddy translation to the comic book page.

Under Claremont, the X-Men has become a much more brutal and realistic title over the past few years. Even the word grim might apply. While in interviews he has talked about pulling back in the other direction, in #170 he pulled a shocker when Storm, who has sworn never to kill, stabs a vicious opponent through the heart. Although she no doubt knew that a mutant was present who would save the woman, the undisguised brutality of the act and the lack of recriminations remains to haunt the reader.

One of the weirdest stories Claremont ever did took place under the Claremont/Smith team when the X-Men encountered bizarre alien beings which Wolverine dubbed "the sleazoids." As with #143, Claremont was once more indulging in an homage to all that H.R. Giger's bizarre work did for **Alien**. It has become the monster cliche of the Eighties, and nowhere is it more present than in Claremont's X-Men. On the plus side, the story these creatures populated was filled with other sorts of wonders which didn't rely on the Sleazoids to strengthen thier invention. The most talked about moment in **X-Men #165** is when Kitty Pryde, who loves Peter Rasputin, offers her 14-year-old self to him in an understated scene whose intentions are all too clear. But Peter does have a nice way of saying "This is not the proper time or place."

MORE X-HEROES

Although conceived with the foreign market in mind, the new X-Men have become a sensation everywhere. Guest appearances in other books are guaranteed to boost sales. Wolverine, the controversial and violent member of the team (whose personality seems to be rubbing off on Storm lately), was a hit in his own four issue mini-series drawn by Frank Miller. Old issues are being reprinted. A companion title, **The New Mutants**, was launched (dubbed "the X-Babies" by the X-Men's own Kitty Pryde), and Brent Anderson drew a popular X-Men graphic novel published book size on slick paper. Mary Jo Duffy even wrote an X-Men prose story for Marvel Novel Series **#9: The Marvel Superheroes**, published in 1979.

Whereas in the Sixties **The X-men** seemed the ugly duckling of the Marvel line, in the Seventies and Eighties they've matured into the consistently enduring hit of the Marvel Age.

Old issues are being reprinted in expanded second editions slated to continue indefinitely.

The New Mutants, which seemed to have such an inauspicious start, has become quite popular and produced a brilliant special last summer written by Chris Claremont and drawn by exciting newcomer Art Adams (who also drew **X-Men** annual 9).

The **X-Men** itself just passed issue 200 and the run has had interesting diversions recently with occasional issues drawn by Barry Smith, who has matured into quite a talent since his Conan days of fifteen years ago.

Even the original **X-Men** have reteamed under the code name **X-Factor**, although Scott Summers has proven to be something of a moral coward as he refuses to deal honestly with the difficult personal life he has now that he is married but Jean Grey has returned. Yes, Jean Grey is back—the "Jean Grey" who died previously proving not to be her at all.

People may complain that there are too many mutant books out there, but I still remember when there was only one back in the Sixties. As in many things, a quote from Oscar Wilde could be applied here: "Anything worth doing is worth doing to excess." **CF**

From The Staff of
Comics Feature—

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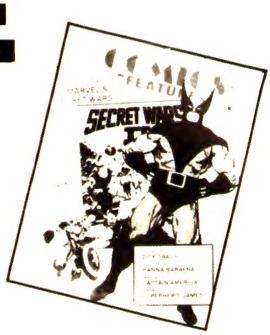

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